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**ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION TO PALESTINE 1945-1948:
THE FRENCH CONNECTION**

ALAN SWARC

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

PhD DEGREE

September 2006

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Abstract of Thesis

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Title of thesis : Illegal Immigration to Palestine 1945-1948: The French Connection

This thesis principally concerns the illegal immigration campaign launched by a secret organisation, the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet (The Mossad), to breach the British naval blockade of Palestine and thereby enable the entry of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. My primary objective is to prove that from late 1945 to April 1948 this campaign was largely facilitated by the covert help of elements within the French coalition Governments, without which it would not have succeeded. Crucially, France takes centre stage because this was the location, par excellence, chosen by the Mossad from which to carry out its operational activities.

Whilst the overall historiography of illegal immigration to Palestine is vast and has included many archival references to French involvement, this has not been clearly substantiated. On the basis of archive sources, some only recently made available, and despite the paucity of direct evidence of French complicity, I will illustrate that there is a wealth of documentation which, taken as a whole, provides compelling circumstantial evidence that this involvement was extensive. Furthermore, I will argue that French cooperation with Zionist leaders extended to political issues and military aid as well. Amongst other issues, I will focus on the rather free environment in France, in the post-war era, which proved to be so conducive to the operations of the Mossad. This includes considerations such as the political make-up of the French Government, the partisan approach of some of its ministers and civil servants, the Jewish community's attitude towards Zionism and the work of intermediaries between certain Government ministers and the Mossad. I will also examine the effects of British diplomatic pressure on the French Ministries involved and the attempts of its Secret Service to prevent illegal ships leaving France.

Illegal Immigration to Palestine 1945-1948: The French Connection

CONTENTS	PAGE
Introduction	4
Chapter 1. Jewish consciousness in post-war France	19
1.1 The Jewish community	20
1.2. French Zionist intermediaries	26
1.3 Other influential lobbyists	35
Chapter 2. Coalition politics in post-war France	37
2.1 The effects of Tripartism	38
2.2 Attitudes within the Socialist Party (SFIO) towards Zionism	40
Chapter 3. The activities of Palestinian emissaries in France	43
3.1 The Jewish Agency	43
3.2 Mossad/Haganah, Irgun Zvai Leumi and Stern Group	59
3.3 Training and transit camps	71
Chapter 4. Other entities concerned with illegal immigration	84
4.1 The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (The Joint)	85
4.2 British Intelligence	92
Chapter 5. The French Connection	104
5.1 A question of motivation	104
5.2 Practical help	113
5.3 Inter-ministerial conflicts caused by British diplomatic pressure	123
Chapter 6. The sea journey to Palestine	148
6.1 Ships from France	150
6.2 Overall statistical results	166
6.3 Other perspectives on illegal immigration	168
Chapter 7. The Exodus Affair	177
7.1 The Exodus story	178
7.2 Public relations issues	186
7.3 The political dimensions of the Affair	198
7.4 Prologue	209
Chapter 8. French military aid	210
8.1 Arms for the Provisional Government of the State of Israel	211
8.2 Arms for the Irgun Zvai Leumi	218
Conclusion	240
Abbreviations	245
Bibliography	247
Appendices	261

(N.B. Whilst all French texts have been translated by the author, Hebrew texts have been translated by others)

Introduction

In Serge Klarsfeld's book Vichy: Auschwitz there are graphic photographs of Jews being coerced onto railway cattle-wagons by the French Gendarmerie in the presence of German soldiers. Their destination, possibly unknown at the time to the Vichy authorities responsible for these actions, was Auschwitz. Deportations from France to this and other Nazi extermination camps in the East extended over a period from March 1942 to July 1944 and involved some 76,000 Jews, the majority of whom were immigrants to France during the inter-war years.¹ The strange and unforeseen irony is that less than two years later in March 1946 the French police authorities, this time in a port near Marseilles, again found themselves processing foreign Jews for departure from France, but this time in a more sympathetic manner and, more importantly, to a destination of choice. Although, for sensitive political reasons, the passengers' visas indicated another country, the true destination, as many French officials privately knew, was Palestine where, despite British rule, there was the hope of a new life. This phenomenon marked not only the sailing of the first so-called "illegal immigration ship" from France but also a level of complicity within post-war Government circles which made this and later sailings from the French coast possible. The act of "illegal immigration" in relation to Jews seeking to reach Palestine was therefore not, by any means, regarded in and outside the French administration with the same intense disapproval as that displayed by the British Government. On the contrary, certain Ministers quietly disregarded the known quota-policy of their former ally and gave covert and extensive assistance to the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet (literally 'Institute for Parallel Immigration') which facilitated the movement of Jewish refugees across France to the ports of embarkation.²

Although this particular French involvement was ultimately recognised in the historiography of Aliyah Bet, academic research into the underlying reasons for the Mossad's success in France, involving the extensive use of relevant archival documents, has been sparse. This study is an attempt to redress the balance by

¹ Serge Klarsfeld, Vichy-Auschwitz: Le Role de Vichy dans la Solution Finale de la Question Juive en France-1942 (Paris, 1983), 7.

² Mossad l'Aliyah Bet was a secret body set up in Palestine 1938 by the Jewish Agency. It was staffed, in the main, by Labour-Zionists from the kibbutz (communal settlement) movement. Whilst this organisation maintained only a functional link to the Jewish Agency's para-military forces, the Haganah, its leader, Shaul Meirov, was one of its top officers. He was a close associate of David Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

reviewing sources used in the past and then bringing into play an interpretation of more recently available documentation from a number of foreign archives. By this means, the role of the various elements within France, who assisted the Mossad and other Palestinian agencies, will be better defined and explained than has hitherto been the case.

To define the *raison d'être* of the Mossad, one could point to its desire to circumvent the restrictive quota on the immigration of Jews into Palestine, which the British Government had imposed in May 1939.³ This prescribed that any Jew attempting to bypass the quota by unauthorised entry would be classed as an "illegal immigrant" and would be arrested and interned. The immediate reaction of the Jewish Agency, under David Ben Gurion, was to ignore this fundamental restriction on immigration at a time when, with the emergence of Nazi-inspired antisemitism, the existence of the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe appeared most at risk. It therefore decided to flout the regulations by actions in which clandestine immigration, or *Aliyah Bet* as it was termed, would play a leading part. In responding to the task allotted to it, and despite Ben Gurion's inclination for centralisation of the decision-making process, the Mossad itself would ultimately determine its own ideology and the operational policies to be pursued.⁴

The Mossad's rescue operations after the beginning of the Second World War, continued from a base in Turkey as long as it was still possible to extract Jews from Eastern Europe, eventually to land them, undetected if possible, on the shores of Palestine. Following the end of the war, Zionist hopes for the abandonment of the 1939 White Paper rose sharply. However it soon became clear that the new Labour Government in England, despite earlier indications to the contrary, was not prepared to allow unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. The American President's

³ The historical background to this arbitrary move can best be judged from two diametrically opposed angles. From the Jewish standpoint it was a form of capitulation to the Arab violence of the three previous years, whose intent was to prevent the fulfilment of Britain's Mandate, which was the creation in Palestine of a National Home for the Jews. The Arab standpoint, on the other hand, viewed unrestricted Jewish immigration as the erosion of the demographical position of the Palestinian Arab in a land which they considered their own. British failure to give satisfaction to the aspirations of either party after nearly two decades of the Mandate and innumerable conferences and proposals was now crowned with a piece of legislation which clearly was intended to address Arab concerns at a time when war in Europe seemed imminent and Britain needed friends in the Middle East. The new regulations provided for a quota limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the next five years and restrictions on Jewish land purchases. At the expiry of the initial period any new quota would be subject to Arab agreement and at the end of ten years there would be an independent state in which, inevitably, the Jews would be a minority. (For further analysis see Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, (London, 1972). Chapter 10 "European Catastrophe").

request to Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, to provide 100,000 Entry Certificates to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, then interned in Displaced Persons Camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, was politely turned down. Pending the results of an Anglo-American Commission of Enquiry into Jewish refugees, a quota on Jewish immigration, now set at 18,000 per year was imposed.⁵ Given the thousands of Jews interned in Displaced Persons Camps after the end of the war, such an unacceptably low number was, for the Jewish Agency, the signal for the active renewal of Aliyah Bet activities. But how best to organise, from far away Tel Aviv, the release and onward movement of thousands of DPs in Europe to the Mediterranean and Adriatic coasts? The logical answer was to create an operational headquarters for the Mossad somewhere in Europe. After considering the few possibilities then existing, France was chosen for a number of practical reasons as the best location.

Without the media coverage of the Exodus Affair in 1947 with its 4,500 illegal immigrants, the role of France in the whole saga of illegal immigration would not have attracted much public attention. Certainly little interest had previously been aroused in respect of thousands of other illegal immigrants who had progressively embarked in French ports. To place the matter in a separate context, the overall total of 16,200 Jews carried on the fifteen boats from France effectively represented less than a quarter of the total number of immigrants who attempted the journey to Palestine during the period under consideration. Indeed, of the eight countries used by the Mossad for illegal immigration, it was from Italy that the greatest number embarked for Palestine, comprising half of all boats and nearly a third of all immigrants.⁶ This relatively high number was linked to the availability of transit camps run by UNRRA,⁷ the influence of the local Mossad operatives⁸ and primarily

⁴ Ze'ev Hadari and Ze'ev Tsahor, *Voyage to Freedom: An Episode in the Illegal Immigration to Palestine* (London, 1985), 78-79. Hereafter Hadari, *Voyage to Freedom*.

⁵ Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York, 1970), 93. Hereafter Bauer, *Flight*.

⁶ See Appendix 1(b) for a breakdown by country of departure.

⁷ UNRRA is the acronym for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency set up in 1943 to deal with an expected post-war refugee problem. It was replaced in 1947 by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO).

⁸ Elihu Bergman, "Adversaries and Facilitators: The Unconventional Diplomacy of Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948", *Israel Affairs*, No.8 (London, 2002), 14. In Italy the success of the Mossad was due in no small measure to Yehuda Arazi and particularly to his successor Ada Sereni, who used her extensive contacts in government circles to convince them that by facilitating the flow of refugees out of the country they would be carrying out both a humanitarian as well as a pragmatic gesture to serve their interests.

the lack of interference by the Italian authorities.⁹ Undoubtedly their passive attitude was largely influenced by the fact that although Italy remained, until September 1947, under Allied occupation, this did not prevent a clandestine flow of Jewish refugees from across the Austrian border.¹⁰ Despite pressure from the British, the unofficial Italian response was to enable them to move on and out of the country as speedily as possible.

In comparison to Italy, France, as one of the victorious Allies, regained full sovereignty after its liberation, was responsible for its own internal and foreign policy and, in theory at least, controlled all its border crossings.¹¹ Furthermore, from the Mossad's viewpoint, the political and public environment then existing in post-war France was especially conducive to setting up a headquarters for those involved in the illegal immigration campaign in Europe. Without the safe base that France represented, one that, unlike Italy, was less susceptible to direct British interference, the Mossad, an intrinsically secretive organisation, could not have operated with so few constraints. The most crucial factor, however, was the extensive covert assistance afforded by certain Socialist Ministers in the Government, powerful civil servants and a host of lesser officials.¹²

It is important to stress, even at this early stage, that these officials did not limit their assistance to the needs of Aliyah Bet only. Other matters of a more political nature arose on which the Jewish Agency was also keen to obtain the support of its friends in the French Government. When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs vacillated over such crucial issues as the Palestine Partition Plan and the recognition of the State of Israel, the Agency used all its contacts, direct and indirect, to ensure that its voice was heard in the corridors of power. Again, when the British finally announced their departure from Palestine, the needs of the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine) for modern armaments with which to confront the expected Arab invasion, were swiftly taken on board by the French Government, albeit, as will be illustrated later, not without some controversial aspects.

⁹ For a very full exposé of the political ramifications of Aliyah Bet in Italy see Fritz Liebreich, Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine 1945-1948 (Oxford, 2005).

¹⁰ Zeev Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany (Cambridge, 2002), 272. Hereafter Mankowitz.

¹¹ Tsilla Hershco, Entre Paris et Jerusalem: La France, le Sionisme et la Création de L'Etat d'Israël, 1945-1949 (Paris, 2003), 59. Hereafter Hershco.

¹² *Ibid.*, 271/272.

It can be argued that the assistance rendered to the Jewish Agency and its more clandestine wings in the Mossad and the Haganah in post-war France has to be considered in the context of a country attempting to negate its Vichy past by emphasising the role of the French Résistance and the Free French Forces in liberating the country. Not surprisingly, the resistance by the paramilitary forces in Palestine to British restrictions on immigration and later its fight for independence, in the face of Arab aggression, would have a certain resonance with former members of the French Résistance. Many of these found themselves in positions of authority after the war and encouraged a return to the old French traditions of welcoming refugees and affording them asylum or transit facilities.

Gratitude, arising from the participation of Jews from Palestine in the Free French Forces and from a shared experience with French Zionists in the Résistance, led some Socialist Government Ministers to use their positions of authority in internal affairs after the war, to quietly extend a helping hand to the Mossad's emissaries. They were quite aware that the sole mission of these emissaries was to organise the immigration to Palestine from French ports of those survivors of the Holocaust who otherwise would have remained interned in Displaced Persons Camps. The fact that, in the process, they did not take into their confidence some of their coalition partners, epitomised the nature of French politics at the time.¹³ For one thing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE), under the control of one of the coalition partners, was concerned to maintain a close relationship with Britain for economic and strategic reasons. For another, it was anxious to re-establish its cultural ties in the Levant, from which it had been ejected, allegedly as a result of British intrigue. Thirdly, the MAE wished to stem the influence of the Arab League over France's North African possessions, with their large Moslem populations. All these sensitive areas of foreign policy were likely to be upset by any disclosure of pro-Zionist activity within the Government. For historical scholarship, such a divergence of policy within the same Government, where illegal immigration to Palestine is the point of conflict, represents an area worthy of exploration.

During this particular period, the sensitive issue of French support for Zionism was enveloped, for justifiable political and security reasons, in a shroud of secrecy. Nevertheless, as this study reveals, there does exist very pertinent and

¹³ Sylvia K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1974), 29. Hereafter Crosbie.

revealing primary material on this subject in French and Israeli archives and to some extent in those of England and the USA. Together with other compelling circumstantial evidence, this material does much to further recognition and assessment of the impact of this French connection to Aliyah Bet and, by extension, to other Zionist projects. Until now, this reality, although often alluded to in a number of French non-academic works, has not been adequately corroborated from archival sources and has, therefore, remained largely anecdotal in practice. The main sources of information used were the memoirs of two ex- Government Ministers, Edouard Depreux and Jules Moch; the head of the counter-espionage Agency, Roger Wybot; and two pro-Zionist investigative reporters, Jacques Derogy and François Armorin. French academic work on the subject appears limited to a few books, articles and dissertations and, even in these, the facilities which the Mossad infrastructure received from a number of agencies in France, although recognised as one of the indispensable elements on which the success of Aliyah Bet in the post-war era rested, are not covered in any depth. Moreover, whilst in Israel works on the overall subject of illegal immigration abound, largely fed by Mossad records of all kinds, most references to French complicity are seriously lacking in supportive documentation.

The exercise of absolute discretion was, of necessity, a vital element in the Mossad's contacts with those Government officials in the Ministries of the Interior and Transport, who particularly favoured their enterprise. The essential objective at all times was to avoid upsetting the fragile coalition which made up the French Government. Another reason for maintaining a veil of secrecy over Mossad/ Government contacts was the known presence on French soil of the British Intelligence service (SIS), which was constantly trying to monitor the movements of suspect ships and individuals involved in illegal immigration from French ports. Direct contacts were avoided by the use of Zionist intermediaries who, as former members of the Résistance, were highly regarded in Socialist Party circles. However, as all these contacts went unrecorded by both sides, this potential documentary source was not available to earlier scholars. Furthermore, the application of a 60-year rule by the French Archives Nationales, to the more sensitive or private papers, rendered access somewhat difficult to achieve. Given these factors which led to researchers encountering difficulties in finding supportive documentation, how

has the existing historiography still been able to assert confidently that there was truly a substantive French connection to Aliyah Bet?

One of the principal sources of support of this premise is the published work of Ze'ev Hadari which deals extensively with the activities of the Mossad in Europe.¹⁴ This Palestinian emissary was a senior operative of the Mossad in Paris between June 1946 and late 1947. Whilst he relates in some detail his contacts with the various sections of the French Ministry of the Interior and especially the counter-espionage agency, the DST, he relies almost exclusively on his own memory and the Mossad files at the Haganah Archives in Tel Aviv. Few French sources are cited here and certainly none that relate to any Government documents confirming the existence of the Mossad in France or its relationship with Ministry officials. Consequently, those parts of Hadari's narrative which refer to the "French Connection", bereft as they are of explicit documentary evidence, must also be considered anecdotal at best.

One of the more informative pieces of French academic work on the subject, is by Anne Grynberg.¹⁵ In her article there are very few citations, the work relying for the most part on interviews with those involved. These deal mainly with the contribution of former members of the Armée Juive (one of the Jewish Resistance movements in France) to the setting up of the Mossad infrastructure in France. She notes with surprise that support for Zionism by certain Ministers was available at a time when, faced with comparatively more important social and economic difficulties on the home front, French politicians risked an open breach with the British, whose material support they needed.¹⁶ In her conclusion, Grynberg concedes that more research was required into the motivation of senior political figures involved in helping the Mossad.

With regard to unpublished papers on the subject, the laurels must go to Joseph Kennet for his voluminous Master's Dissertation, which directly inspired the

¹⁴ Hadari's books comprise: Voyage to Freedom: An Episode in the Illegal Immigration to Palestine (co-authored with Ze'ev Tsahor, London, 1985); Second Exodus: The Full story of Jewish Illegal Immigration To Palestine, 1945-1948 (Beer Sheva, Israel, 1991) and Ha'Mossad I'Aliyah Bet: Yoman Mevazi'im-Paris 1947 (Beer Sheva, Israel, 1991).

¹⁵ Anne Grynberg, «France 1944-1947, Ouvrir les Portes de Sion: De la Résistance Contre le Nazisme à la Solidarité avec Israël » Les Nouveaux Cahiers, No.90 (Automne, 1987), 20. Hereafter Grynberg.

¹⁶ This was the era of the Marshall Plan for the post-war rehabilitation of European economies, put forward by the US Secretary of State, George Marshall, during a speech at Harvard University on 5th June 1947. France had every economic and material interest in coordinating the successful fulfilment of this Plan with Great Britain. Equally the onset of the "Cold War" with the Soviet Union necessitated France playing her part with her former British and American Allies.

further research work invested in this study.¹⁷ As to the few relevant books, the most noteworthy is that of David Lazard.¹⁸ As the title of his book implies, the nature of French public opinion towards the creation of a Jewish State is the main subject matter. His evidence is accumulated from a wide range of articles in the French press, sometimes by pro-Zionist reporters, who had been invited by the Mossad to accompany immigrants on board illegal ships. However, source references, as such, are few and far between and Lazard has relied heavily for his facts on his interviews with some of the central characters, either employed or connected with the Mossad in Paris during 1946 and 1947. His principal assertion is that, in addition to Government Ministers, a whole host of civil servants, policemen and dock officials were not only aware of illegal immigration activities but lent vital support when it was necessary.¹⁹

Lazard's book was preceded in 1969 by that of Jacques Derogy, a pro-Zionist investigative reporter.²⁰ Derogy's detailed account of the Exodus Affair and particularly the precise nature of his information regarding the activities of the British Secret Service in the Marseilles area, would suggest his sources to have been officials within the Government. Not surprisingly, he provides no citations, but the memoirs of Roger Wybot, the head of the French counter-espionage Agency, the DST, published some six years later, clearly point to Derogy's source as being Wybot himself.²¹ The fact that the former Interior Minister, Edouard Depreux, in his own memoirs, particularly commends Derogy's book for the accuracy of its reporting about the Exodus Affair tends to transform what was, at the time, an uncorroborated story, into an officially approved historical account.²²

Another French Minister, to an even greater extent than Depreux, proclaimed in his memoirs how he used his position to give assistance to Aliyah Bet and other pro-Zionist activities. This was Jules Moch, the Minister for Public Works and Transport

¹⁷ Joseph Kennet, L'Angleterre, la France et l'immigration Clandestine en Palestine, 1945-1948 Master's Dissertation (Mémoire de Maîtrise), Université de Paris 1, la Sorbonne (Paris, 1985), 1-303. In relation to the French attitude towards illegal immigration he relied extensively on the private papers of André Blumel, which included copies of many French ministerial documents not otherwise available because of the 60 year non-accessibility rule. (Livre 2 du Code du Patrimoine consacré aux archives et du décret no.79-1038 du 3 décembre 1979). Hereafter Kennet.

¹⁸David Lazard, L'Opinion Française et la Naissance de l'Etat d'Israël, 1945-1949 (Paris, 1972).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰Jacques Derogy, La Loi du Retour. La Secrète et Véritable Histoire de l'Exodus (Paris, 1969). Hereafter Derogy, La Loi du Retour.

²¹ Philippe Bernert, Roger Wybot et la Bataille pour la DST (Paris, 1975). Hereafter Bernert.

²²Edouard Depreux, Souvenirs d'un Militant: de la Social-Démocratie au Socialisme. Un Demi-Siècle de Luttés (Paris, 1972). Hereafter Depreux.

who later replaced Depreux at the Ministry of the Interior.²³ Yet a third Socialist, Vincent Auriol, who became the first President of France in the post-war era, adds spice to their narrative with a few obscure revelations in his diary, relating in the main to cabinet meetings.²⁴ As President, he was required to preside over these meetings in which, by tradition, no formal minutes were taken. Due to their absence, there has been a tendency by some historians to accept his diary entries as a reasonable reflection of what actually transpired. Given Auriol's political leanings, reliance on his memoirs as well as those of Depreux and Moch requires a certain amount of caution. Consequently, in dealing with their various assertions, I have taken care to seek corroborative evidence wherever possible.

Those Israeli and French historians who specifically refer to the French connection to illegal immigration, rely largely on the sources detailed above, but without, as has been pointed out, the support of primary documentation to corroborate the narrative. Consequently, the overall effect is one of inordinate reliance on anecdotal evidence, from which it was concluded that there had been French Government complicity in Aliyah Bet. This generally accepted view is expressed in the works of Catherine Nicaud²⁵ and Frédérique Schillo.²⁶ Both assert that the Socialist Ministers within the Government coalition had a natural affinity with French Zionists. Furthermore those Zionists who were also members of the SFIO (French Socialist Party) provided the necessary links between the Socialist Ministers, their officials and the leaders of the Mossad. Also significant were the bonds established during the war-time occupation, when Socialists and Zionists, active in the Resistance, supported each other both materially and psychologically in their fight against both the Vichy regime and the Germans. But again, the support of primary documentation for all these assertions is seriously lacking.

Even when examining the role of one supposedly opposed to the pro-Zionists within the Socialist Party, namely Georges Bidault, the leader of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), there are a large number of contradictory stories as to his true attitude. Though representing the conservative forces in the coalition Government, Bidault, as former head of the war-time Committee for National

²³Jules Moch, *Une si Longue Vie* (Paris, 1976). Hereafter Moch.

²⁴Vincent Auriol, *Journal du Septennat, 1947-1954* (Paris, 1970). Hereafter Auriol.

²⁵Catherine Nicaud, *La France et le Sionisme 1897-1948: Une Rencontre Manquée?* (Paris, 1992). Hereafter Nicaud.

²⁶Frédérique Schillo, *La France et la Création de l'Etat d'Israël: 18 février 1947-11 mai 1949* (Paris, 1997). Hereafter Schillo.

Resistance (CNR), was accorded a high level of respect by the Socialists despite his political affiliation. Invariably, even under a succession of Socialist Prime Ministers, he retained the portfolio for Foreign Affairs. However the Département de l'Afrique - Levant (Middle East Department) within his Ministry was perceived by many of his colleagues in the coalition Government to have strong pro-Arab tendencies. This suspicion arose because of the Department's considered view that only the pursuit of friendly relations with the Arab League would help to maintain French hegemony over its North African possessions. Inevitably, however, this justification precluded any sympathy within the Department for the Zionist cause.²⁷

In the historiography, confusion persists as to Bidault's real attitude towards Zionism. This derives from his inept attempts to stem the flow of illegal immigration from France so as to placate the British, his prevarication on the Palestine Partition vote in the UN Assembly and his apparent later conversion to the Zionist cause. On the one hand he is accused of a marked hesitancy and caution in all his actions concerning the Palestine issue whilst, on the other, he is credited with having an empathy for Zionism.²⁸ This inconsistency leads to a number of questions. For instance, did he share the British Foreign Minister's aversion to the notion of a Jewish State or did he, more likely, just leave it to his officials at the Quai d'Orsay to determine policy on Palestine, whilst he concentrated mainly on European affairs, as Hershco suggests?²⁹ To add to the confusion, Jules Moch in his memoirs virtually suggests that Bidault's irascibility concerning illegal immigration was all part of a great masquerade to impress the British.³⁰

Unhelpfully, Bidault in his own memoirs does not refer once to the subject of Palestine, leaving the impression that, for him at least, it was an unimportant issue.³¹ Even a later interview with an Israeli reporter, concerning the clandestine shipment of arms on the Altalena for the benefit of the para-military Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organisation), shed little light on his true intentions. Fortunately, however, in respect of this one affair, archival sources, some of them containing significant

²⁷ Idith Zertal, « Le cinquième Côté du Triangle: La France, les Juifs et la question de la Palestine, 1945-1948 » in Irad Malkin and J. Brill, eds., *La France et la Méditerranée, vingt-sept Siècles d'Interdépendances*, (Leiden, Netherlands, 1990), 418. Hereafter Zertal, « Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle ».

²⁸ Jacques Dalloz, *Georges Bidault: Bibliographie Politique* (Paris, 1992), 274.

²⁹ Hershco, 45.

³⁰ Moch, 269.

³¹ Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (London, 1967) (Translated from the French: *d'une Résistance à une autre*). These memoirs were written by Bidault whilst he was in exile in Brazil and Belgium between 1963 and 1967.

unpublished material do provide, as I will illustrate, a new insight into Bidault's actions and those of his officials at the time (See Chapter 8).

Not surprisingly, extensive research work on Aliyah Bet has been carried out by Israelis in and out of Israel. From small beginnings it has developed into a vast body of academic and non-academic literature. In the early years of the State, the subject took on an almost mystical aura and was construed as one of the major strategic achievements of the Yishuv and its most eminent and charismatic leader, David Ben Gurion. Almost inevitably a number of legends and stories emerged, rising to mythical proportions, as to the activities of the Mossad and the Palmach (shock-troops of the Haganah) during the British Mandate.³²

Eventually breaking cover, those who had actually been involved in Aliyah Bet, began to publish their own personal memoirs in the 1960s.³³ From these necessarily subjective beginnings, a historiography finally emerged. Under the direction of Anita Shapira of Tel Aviv University and with the collaboration of four other universities, "The Shaul Avigur [formerly Meirov] Inter-University Project for the Study of Aliyah Bet" was launched. The first 17 studies resulting from this project, were published in Tel Aviv in 1990.³⁴ Included was a monograph on the epic story of the Haganah ship Exodus '47'.

The trials and tribulations of the passengers of the Exodus, had provoked worldwide interest and were later the subject of innumerable books and a Hollywood feature film. But the first official account of the Exodus Affair, with its intrinsically French connection and certainly the biggest media event of Aliyah Bet during its whole existence, was published in 1949 by a journalist, Bracha Habbas under the title The ship which Won: the History of the Exodus 1947.³⁵ Eshewing his usual low-profile approach, the Mossad's chief, Shaul Meirov, was the person who supplied her with the material she used. Party political reasons were the main motivation for his involvement. Being a member of Mapai (Israel Labour Party) his objective was to establish the pre-eminent role of the Mossad in the Aliyah Bet campaign and by so

³² Idith Zertal, From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel, (Berkeley, California, 1998), 170. Hereafter Zertal, Catastrophe.

³³ They included Yigal Allon, head of the Palmach, (Shield of David, 1960); Shaul Meirov, head of the Mossad (With the Haganah Generation, 1961); Arye 'Lova' Eliav, Mossad operative (The Voyage of the Uluah, 1969); Ehud Avriel, Second in Command of the Mossad (Open the Gates, 1975).

³⁴ Its original Hebrew title was translated into English as Ha'apalah: Studies in the History of Illegal Immigration into Palestine, 1934-1948.

³⁵ Dalia Ofer, "The Historiography of Aliyah Bet", in Yisrael Gutman and Gideon Greif, eds., Conference Proceedings. Fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem 1983 (Jerusalem, 1988), 599

doing reduce that of the Palmach, which owed allegiance to a more extreme left-wing party, Mapam.³⁶

In the annals of Aliyah Bet, the story of the Exodus rose to prominence because the 4,500 immigrants she carried to Palestine were fiercely resolute, despite the appalling conditions which they had to endure, in refusing all blandishments to land in France after the British returned them to their country of departure. The British compounded this initial public relations disaster by finally returning them to Germany. It was the only instance of its kind. The ground-breaking achievement of such studies as that of the Exodus was that, for the first time, the immigrants themselves, the so-called Ma'apilim, shared the stage with the more high profile organisers and emissaries who, in the earlier publications referred to, had been cast as the main heroes.³⁷

In more recent years, two other Israeli academics, Arie Kochavi and Idith Zertal, have devoted extensive chapters in their books to illegal immigration activities in France. Both have brought to bear their own interpretations of available archival material, in Kochavi's case exclusively from British sources and in Zertal's from French as well as Israeli sources. Kochavi took the questionable view that the French Socialist Ministers, whilst assisting Jewish refugees to reach Palestine, saw no conflict with their desire for close relations with the British, as the issue was only "marginal".³⁸ Zertal's main focus, which later raised heated controversy, was to suggest that Aliyah Bet was primarily a large-scale public relations exercise which viewed the establishment of a Jewish State as its only objective, with scant regard for the conditions under which immigrants were transported on un-seaworthy ships. She also contended that there was friction between the Palmach and the Mossad over the former's insistence that immigrants should physically resist British boarding parties at sea.³⁹ By contrast, Tsilla Hershcó's book, although also largely based on French sources, only briefly covers Aliyah Bet and concentrates primarily on French and Zionist diplomatic manoeuvring over the 1947 Partition vote and the eventual recognition of the State of Israel. Nevertheless, as many of the personalities involved played a role directly or indirectly in Aliyah Bet, her insights bring another

³⁶ Aviva Haramish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine*, (London, 1990), 269. Hereafter Haramish.

³⁷ Ze'ev Tsahor, book review on Anita Shapira (ed) "Ha'apalah: Studies in the History of Illegal immigration into Palestine, 1934-1948", in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 9 (Oxford, 1993).

³⁸ Arie Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, The United States and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Chapel Hill and London, 2001), 274.

useful dimension to the subject. In a more general context other authors have also, with the passage of time, carefully reflected on the purpose, implementation and overall effect of the illegal immigration campaign and some of the issues they raise will be addressed later in this thesis.

Among the most recent works on illegal immigration is that of Fritz Liebreich, who concentrated on the British reaction to the phenomenon.⁴⁰ Although he reserves a whole chapter to countries from which illegal immigrants set sail, very little of his commentary is devoted to France. The main focus of his wide-ranging research is directed towards Italy, which he perceived as the more important of the two locations. Nevertheless, Liebreich does recognise the two crucial factors which were specific to France, namely the close cooperation between the DST and the Mossad and the reluctance of Socialist Ministers in the coalition Government to bow to British diplomatic pressure over illegal immigration.⁴¹

By drawing on the existing body of secondary literature described above and even more extensively on documentation now available in French, Israeli, American and British archives, this study will decisively demonstrate that not only was there a large-scale and sympathetic French connection to Aliyah Bet by specific elements within the Government, but that this was an essential prerequisite for the Mossad to achieve success in its enterprise. Furthermore, this study also reveals other areas of French support for the Zionist enterprise which, although they followed in the footsteps of the illegal immigration campaign, have been largely ignored.

This study begins with an examination of Jewish domestic and political issues in France during the immediate post-war period and the role Zionist intermediaries played in relation to the French Government. This first chapter is followed by a chapter which explains how the complexities of coalition politics enabled covert assistance by certain Ministers towards the Mossad to be ongoing and remain virtually unchallenged within the Cabinet. A chapter is then devoted to the extensive activities of Palestinian emissaries, both official and unofficial, on French soil. The role of other entities concerned with supporting or opposing illegal immigration, the American Jewish Distribution Committee and British Intelligence

³⁹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 168.

⁴⁰ Fritz Liebreich, *Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine, 1945-1948* (Oxford, 2005). Hereafter Liebreich.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86 and 88.

respectively, is examined in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I address the principal objective of this study by setting out the various aspects of the French connection to illegal immigration and how this was affected by British diplomatic pressure. A detailed account of the illegal ships which left from French ports, an analysis of the overall results achieved by Aliyah Bet and a discussion on other perspectives are set out in Chapter 6. This is then followed by a chapter specifically devoted to the Exodus Affair, which had such a dramatic effect on world public opinion. The final chapter, in dealing with French military aid in the first months of the nascent Israeli State, illustrates how one form of French assistance, having come to its natural end, was replaced by another as the needs of the moment dictated.

As previously indicated this study is based largely on primary documentation sourced from archives in four countries. The approach adopted has been to progressively identify and visit those state and private archives most likely to contain relevant data on the subject matter. In the United Kingdom the files of the Admiralty, War Office, Foreign Office and Colonial Office at the National Archives, were the most immediately accessible and comprehensive. In the footnotes the relative files are indicated by a TNA number, the prefix of which indicates the Ministry involved (For example: FO for Foreign Office).

In France, the Archives Nationales in Paris not only contained documents deposited by the various Ministries but also the private papers of various Ministers, such as Georges Bidault and Jules Moch. Branches of the Archives Nationales in Fontainebleau and Marseilles were also visited to inspect other relevant material. Invariably most of the files selected were subject to a 60 rather than the more common 30-year rule and the granting of dispensation from this rule was a prerequisite to achieve access. This involved obtaining specific permission from the original depositor of the documents, whether a Ministry or the relatives of a deceased individual. Response times were anything from three months to a year but, with perseverance, approval was generally forthcoming. The file reference for private papers contain the letters AP (Archives Privées). Most Ministry of the Interior files are numbered with the prefix F1a or F7 and largely contain reports from the Renseignements Généraux (Political Police branch of the Sûreté Nationale). In addition to those deposited at the Archives Nationales, many Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) files were retained within the Ministry's own archives at the Quai d'Orsay. Other archives visited in Paris were generally non-State or private archives

where access to material was relatively easy to obtain once the research project had been explained.

In New York, access to the archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution committee (The "Joint") and the Center for Jewish History (YIVO) presented no particular difficulty. In Israel the only constraint was the language when Hebrew text was involved but, as many of the documents inspected were in English or French, this was not a major impediment. Other than that, the level of assistance received in all five archives visited in Israel was the best encountered in all of the many archives visited.

A limited number of interviews were carried out in France and Israel. Fortunately, in the case of those who had direct involvement with illegal immigration, their ability to recall facts and answer detailed questions, despite their advancing years, provided very worthwhile first-hand testimony, which have been extensively reproduced. Those newspaper articles quoted present a flavour of the times and are representative of certain political outlooks then prevailing.

To conclude this introduction, I would emphasise that this dissertation is an attempt to move the scholarship on French involvement in Aliyah Bet significantly forward. In view of the difficulty in directly pinpointing incontrovertible evidence of complicity between elements in the French Government and the Mossad, a rather empirical method of research had to be adopted. This wide-ranging effort consisted of identifying, analysing, comparing and interpreting a great number of primary documents from many sources, which had a bearing on the subject. The result of this exercise will demonstrate that not only did such a complicity exist, but that it was the key to a successful clandestine partnership in which illegal immigration, although the main area of activity, was not the only area of cooperation involving French officials and the Zionist leadership.

CHAPTER 1 Jewish consciousness in post-war France

In the aftermath of the war, the spirit of the anti-Nazi Résistance did not disappear amongst those of the Jewish native elite and the immigrants from Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe, who had been involved in its activities. They had survived the war essentially by recognising that the Vichy Government under Pétain would not serve as a protective buffer between them and the Germans. Also signs of unity appeared as the pre-war dissensions between native Jews and immigrant Jews were dissipated to a large extent through the shared experience of Vichy-inspired discriminatory legislation. The deliberate economic impoverishment of native Jews, banned from their businesses and liberal professions was matched by even worse measures against immigrant Jews involving, to a far greater extent, their arrest by the French police and incarceration under the control of the Gendarmerie. From March 1942, Vichy, initially hesitant and then more pro-active, became a partner in the German “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem” and permitted the removal of Jews out of France to a so-called ‘unidentified destination’ in the East, which the children in the Drancy detention camp outside Paris fancifully called ‘Pitchi-Poi’. In reality its true name was Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹

The major change in outlook, even before final liberation, was that the ideas of the Zionists, previously given scant attention, now appealed to many Jews in France, both native and immigrant, as the ideal solution for the future. Even if this was not a solution for themselves, then at least it did provide the hope of a safe haven for those Jews who were making their way into the Displaced Persons Camps in Austria and Germany and indeed for East European Jews in general.

Proud of the opportunity to facilitate the movement of these DPs across France to the Mediterranean ports for embarkation to British-controlled Palestine, former members of the specifically Jewish Résistance and other Jews in the overall

¹ For a detailed account of these events see Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France and the Jews (New York, 1981) (Note: The first edition of this work was published in France as Vichy et les Juifs, 1981). This ground-breaking academic work directly exposed the Vichy Government, rather than the German occupation forces, as the prime instigator of anti-Jewish legislation and repressive measures against the Jews from late 1940 onwards. Serge Klarsfeld's Vichy-Auschwitz published two years later provides extensive documentary evidence of Vichy's complicity with the Gestapo authorities in the round-up and deportation of thousands of Jews. Although Klarsfeld's work effectively complements that of Marrus and Paxton, he does take issue with them for not giving sufficient weight to the strength of French public opinion in the Free Zone and the intervention of the Catholic clergy, which temporarily stopped the deportation process in October 1942 (Page 9).

French Résistance lent all their skills to this endeavour. This was carried out on both a logistical level (running of transit camps and transport facilities) and on the political level.

Using the strong connections they had established under war-time conditions with the underground Socialist party, the native Jewish elite sought to ensure that the French bureaucracy not only did not impede the exercise, but in many instances lent a hand. Given the opposing attitudes towards Zionism reflected in post war French coalitions, the more pro-Zionist Socialist Ministers tended to be very circumspect in their dealings with both French Zionist intermediaries and the Palestinian emissaries that had set up covert operations in Paris after the Liberation.

In recognising that most French Jews, in the post-war era, did not see immigration to Palestine as a solution for themselves, one has to acknowledge that they had at the time more urgent preoccupations. Equally, the majority of the Jewish community, despite their sufferings and insecurity under the Vichy Government, maintained a strong attachment to the French way of life and its culture. Thus, although a number of Zionist intermediaries in France were keen to facilitate illegal immigration to Palestine for Jewish DPs in Germany and Austria, they themselves remained wedded to their country of birth or adoption.

In order to understand these apparent contradictions, how then should one characterise the preoccupations and attitudes of the Jewish community and its Zionist intermediaries?

1.1 The Jewish community

This pre-war community had been diverse, both in origin and also in its social and political spheres. Among its 320,000 members, over half were immigrants and they themselves were divided between various factions covering the whole political spectrum.

In this hodge-podge of organisations, the Zionists were on the margins, riven, like other factions, by their own internal splits.² Nevertheless the immigrant umbrella organisation, the Fédération des Sociétés Juives de France (FSJF), was certainly pro-Zionist in its approach. There was also this tendency in the leadership of the Eclaireurs Israélites de France (EIF). This was the scouting movement, supported

² The ideology of the individual Zionist parties in France reflected that of their sister parties in Palestine.

by the French Jewish elite and the Central Consistoire, the recognised rabbinical authority. The suffering in the war years was to cement among many youngsters a greater attachment to Zionist thought and philosophy. This was due in no small measure to the clandestine activities of Zionist groups both in and outside the French Resistance.

Even the Jewish Communists allied themselves with a growing Zionist trend within the Jewish community at large. During the war, in the so-called Free Zone, Joseph Fischer of the World Zionist Organisation (WZO) together with Nahum Hermann, Director of the Jewish National Fund, forged strong links with Marc Jarblum's clandestine network of the French Zionist Organisation. In September 1944, towards the end of the German occupation, the various trends in French Judaism (the Consistoire Central, the Zionists and the Jewish Communists) came together in Lyons to create a new Jewish representative body, the Conseil Représentatif des Israélites de France (CRIF). Later the term "Israélites" was dropped in favour of "Institutions Juives". As a mark of the coming of age of Zionism within the Jewish community, the charter of CRIF specifically mentioned unlimited emigration to Palestine and the abolition of the White Paper as primary aims.³

Within the French Jewish community as a whole, immigrant Jews and more importantly, because of their influence in Socialist politics, the French Jewish elite promoted the Zionist cause with all their energy. It had not been an easy conversion, for native Jews, as opposed to the more numerous immigrants in the pre-war community, had always regarded France as their sole homeland.

The effects of the persecution of the Jews under Vichy did not provoke a general movement towards Aliyah. In his first report in March 1945 to the Jewish Agency its local co-Director in Paris, David Shaltiel, was relatively pessimistic as to the desire of Jews in France to emigrate to Palestine.⁴ Indeed, when he visited the French Embassy in London in November 1944 in pursuit of a visa for France, Shaltiel indicated that the 2,000 Palestine Entry Certificates he carried were for stateless Jews only. He was careful to emphasise to the French Ambassador that French Jews had never expressed a desire to go to Palestine. In any event, the policy of the Jewish Agency was not to approach Jews already well-integrated in their country of abode

³ Adam Rayski, *Le Choix des Juifs sous Vichy: Entre Soumission et Résistance* (Paris, 1992), 345.

⁴ Renée Poznanski, "L'Héritage de la Guerre: le Sionisme en France dans les Années 1944-1947" in Doris Bensimon and Benjamin Pinkus, eds., *Actes du Colloque International : Les Juifs de France, le Sionisme et l'État d'Israël* (Paris, 1987), 258

but to search out for immigration non-integrated Jews from Eastern Europe. In passing, Shaltiel, in a clear recognition of French sensitivities over their position in the Levant, pointed out the services which the Jewish Agency was prepared to render France in the Middle East and particularly in Lebanon.⁵

As it turned out later, there was something of a hiatus in the allocation of the 2000 Entry Certificates. In late 1944 there were difficulties in acquiring shipping space for potential immigrants even if they could be assembled.⁶ Six months later, the generally negative attitude of Jews in France towards Aliyah was reflected in a report by Eliahu Dobkin to the Mapai secretariat: "There is a real danger that the desire for Aliyah which we witnessed in the first months after the Liberation [of France] will disappear." Three hundred and fifty Entry Certificates to Palestine sent to Paris to bring youngsters to Palestine had not been taken up. In October 1945 a similar situation was noted amongst Jews in Italy, Belgium and Holland.⁷

As dislocated families tried to retrieve their former homes and find their missing relatives, their major preoccupation was the reconstruction of their former lives within the French State. Emigration to an unknown land in an even more difficult environment did not appeal to Jews in France as a rational proposition.⁸ Sir Herbert Emerson, the director of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees reported in November 1944 that material conditions were definitely bad for all Jews in France, but rather worse for immigrants than native Jews.⁹ As if to encapsulate this state of affairs, Marc Jarblum, the returning president of the FSJF, wrote on 1st December 1944

At the moment of Liberation nobody thought of the problems which face us now. Happy to have come out of the nightmare, to have got rid of the Germans and the SS and to be free of the danger of arrest or deportation, we forgot what our situation was. For each one of us our joy was firstly spoilt by the disappearance of parents, children and friends.

Reality reaffirms its rights. The majority find themselves at the edge of the abyss. Everything must be started again from zero. The majority of

⁵ Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Hereafter MAE Archives), Sionisme.Dossier Général, File 373, Carton 72, Rene Massigli, French Ambassador in London to G. Bidault, 1.12.44.

⁶ Ze'ev Hadari, HaMossad l'Aliyah Bet: Yoman Mevazi'im- Paris 1947, (Beer Sheva, Israel, 1991), 36. Hereafter Hadari, HaMossad.

⁷ *Ibid.*, The Second Exodus: the Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948 (London, 1991), 17. Hereafter Hadari, Second Exodus.

⁸ Annette Wieviorka, « Les Juifs en France au lendemain de la Guerre : Etat des Lieux. » in Archives Juives no.28/1. 1^{er} Semestre (Paris, 1995), 10 and 18.

⁹ The National Archives (Hereafter TNA), FO 371/42885, 13.11.44.

Jews have lost everything - their assets, the possibility of work, their businesses, their homes.¹⁰

Jarblum was speaking from personal experience as, on his return to Paris in October 1944 from Switzerland, where he had taken refuge, he found that his flat had been ransacked by the Germans and that it was now occupied by a tenant, pending legal moves for its restitution.¹¹

Aside from these difficult domestic problems, the leadership of the post-war community was concerned with the plight of orphaned children. Some 10,000 Jewish children had lost their parents through deportation and many Jewish organisations took them into care. Others, so-called "Hidden children", had been placed for safeguarding in Catholic homes or institutions. Amongst them there remained a very small minority, who would neither willingly leave their Catholic foster parents/institutions to be retrieved by relatives or Jewish organisations nor be allowed to depart by the church authorities. Jarblum received a series of telegrams from the Jewish Agency in Palestine asking him to intervene with the French authorities and indicating that they were prepared to receive all Jewish orphans in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Holland under the auspices of Youth Aliyah. Furthermore the British authorities in Palestine had already allocated over 3,000 Entry Certificates for the purpose.¹²

Only recently has it come to light that the Vatican itself was directly involved in preventing the return of Jewish children in France even to their surviving parents if, in the interim, they had been baptised. The same restriction applied to institutions "that are not in a position to guarantee them a Christian upbringing". Clearly this eliminated Jewish organisations. Even if the children had not been baptised, the Vatican's instructions stipulated that children ought not to be entrusted to "persons who have no rights over them".¹³ The "Finaly Affair" was a case in point. Here the Catholic Church aided and abetted a nun to hide two orphaned boys in a convent in Spain, out of reach of the French courts who had demanded their release. Only in

¹⁰Renée Poznanski, *Être Juif en France Pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Paris, 1994), 668. Hereafter Poznanski, *Être Juif*.

¹¹ Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (Hereafter CZA) Jarblum Papers, A303/20, Letter from Jarblum to Mosheh Shertok, 14.10.44.

¹² CZA, Jarblum Papers, Telegrammes from Gruenbaum, Jerusalem to Jarblum, 14th and 15th October 1944.

¹³ Article in *The Guardian* 29.12.04, referring to the recent publication by the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* of a letter dated 20th October 1946 sent by the Vatican to Angelo Roncalli, the Holy See's envoy in Paris.

1953 did the French Catholic Church, assailed on all sides by Jewish as well as Christian protests, facilitate the reunion of the two boys with their aunt in Israel.¹⁴ Previously in 1947, the Joint under the directorship in France of Laura Margolis, the wife of Marc Jarblum, funded a “Commission de Dépistage” (search committee) in conjunction with the French rabbinate, which sent out agents across the departments of France to identify and retrieve any remaining children. The results, however, were minimal.¹⁵

Another issue, as in the case of Jarblum, was the restitution of expropriated property to its rightful owners. Many Jewish-owned flats, abandoned by their owners as a result of arrest by the Vichy authorities or simply in order to seek refuge in the unoccupied Free Zone, had been allocated to those made homeless by Allied bombing. New French legislation in November 1944 restored the rights of the former owners but forbade the expulsion of the tenants unless alternative housing was available. The same law returned Jewish businesses that had been placed in the hands of provisional administrators by the Vichy regime. In both instances, even by the middle of 1951, only half of the Jews of Paris had recovered their assets.¹⁶

Yet a further issue, this time exclusively for foreign Jews, was their ardent desire for French nationality, the lack of which during the war, many believed, left them without protection. For those who had served as volunteers in the French army this was a priority issue and they deplored the slowness of the authorities in addressing their demands.¹⁷

In an article on the problems of Jewish reconstruction in France in the post-war era, David Weinberg asserted that “Antisemitism remained strong throughout the 1940s and 1950s, as Frenchmen reacted with hostility to the arrival of East and Central European Jews fleeing DP camps.....”¹⁸ Although this may be true of certain sections of the French public there is, in stark contrast, the active but covert help

¹⁴ David Weinberg, “The Reconstruction of the French Community after WWII”, in Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., Conference Proceedings. Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem 1985 (Jerusalem, 1990), 173. Hereafter Weinberg.

¹⁵ Consistoire de Paris, Service Archives. Letter from Laura Margolis, AJDC- Office For France, to Rabbi Apeloig, Consistoire Central. 4.11.48.

¹⁶ Renée Poznanski, Etre Juif, 675.

¹⁷ Archives Nationales, Ministère de l’Intérieur, Direction de la Sûreté Nationale F1a/4742. Renseignements Généraux report on Congrès National des Engagés Volontaires et Combattants Immigrés de la Résistance, 21st and 22nd February, 1947. In 1946, fifteen thousand naturalisations had been approved and in 1947, 50,000 were anticipated. The Minister for the Population recognised that because of France’s low birth rate, she had great need of immigrants and therefore naturalisations would be expedited.

¹⁸ Weinberg, 176.

given to these refugees by the French authorities and the agreement to allow the transit of 8,000 Jewish refugees through France at any time. (See Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of these matters).

In the event, though Aliyah as an alternative to a reestablishment of their lives in France scarcely captured the imagination of the majority of Jews in France, the commitment of the community to the Zionist enterprise was widespread. Zionist political activity was at once intense but fragmented because of the large numbers of factions representing different ideological tendencies. On the left were grouped the two wings of Poalei-Zion (reflecting the 1944 split in Mapai, the Israel Labour Party) and Hashomer Hatsair. On the right were the Revisionists. The centre was represented by the General Zionists and religious Zionism by the Mizrachi party. The Jewish communists, although not a Zionist party, were nevertheless heavily committed to unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. They were represented by the Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide (UJRE).

Most of the members of these parties were immigrant Jews. Despite their inter-party squabbles they often came together at mass meetings when particular events affecting the Yishuv demanded a show of solidarity. A specific example is the meeting organised by the steering committee of the Zionists of France on 4th July 1946 at the Mutualité which drew a crowd in excess of the hall's capacity. French Zionist leaders such as Marc Jarblum and André Blumel addressed the meeting to protest the arrest on 29th June of leaders of the Jewish Agency Executive and members of para-military units by the British in Palestine. However the largest ovation was reserved for David Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Executive now literally exiled in Paris as a result of the British action.¹⁹

Mass meetings apart, political activity centred on electing delegates to the 22nd Zionist Congress to be held in Basle in December 1946. Here the factionalism among the parties was most evident, with each tendency striving to obtain votes for its preferred delegates. However, electoral fraud was so wide-spread that on 20th October 1946, the Central Electoral Commission cancelled the results and rescheduled the elections to a later date.²⁰

Although not necessarily candidates themselves for immigration to Palestine, many Jews in France attended Zionist meetings to give their political and material

¹⁹ CZA, A426/46. Daily Bulletin of Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 7.7.46

²⁰ Archives Nationales, F1a/3368, Renseignements Généraux report, 21.10.46. Hereafter RG report.

support. At the same time many youngsters who had been taught about Zionism whilst hidden by Jewish organisations during the war years, begged their parents to be allowed to go to Palestine. Usually persuaded to renew and complete their studies, they were nevertheless among the first to volunteer for the new Israeli army, when it was formed after the creation of the State in May 1948. In the meantime the more adventurous among them worked as volunteer couriers and general helpers to the Mossad.²¹ This spirit of commitment was demonstrated most forcibly at the time of the Exodus Affair in July 1947, when large numbers of Zionist youth were mobilised in the Marseilles area in case the British attempted to forcibly disembark the immigrants from their prison-ships (See Chapter 7)

1.2 French Zionist intermediaries

The part played by leading French Zionists in encouraging Socialist Government Ministers, such as Edouard Depreux and Jules Moch, to covertly assist the illegal immigration campaign was at all times essential to the success of the enterprise. In addition, the Jewish Agency in Paris could use the talents of these intermediaries in a more official capacity whenever an attempt was needed to influence Government policy in its favour. The major personalities involved were André Blumel, Marc Jarblum and a priest, L'Abbé Alexandre Glasberg.

The effectiveness of these three intermediaries was largely due to their tactful exploitation of the bonds of comradeship established with members of the Resistance who became highly placed Government Ministers and officials in the post-war period. They in turn covertly facilitated illegal immigration and also rendered political support to the overall Zionist endeavour. All the while, the intermediaries endeavoured to ensure that the risk of public and political exposure of this support was kept to a minimum. It is highly doubtful that, without such intermediaries working in the shadow of French politics, the Mossad's activities

²¹ Interview with Maurice Szwarc, former member of Machal (Foreign volunteers for Israel), 17.9.05. In early 1946, Maurice had planned to disobey his parents and leave for Marseilles with his friend Dov Gurwitz, also nearly 16 years old at the time. Unfortunately, just prior to departure, he found himself in hospital with appendicitis. Dov made his way alone to Marseilles and managed to stowaway aboard the liner SS Champolion. He was discovered prior to arrival in Haifa, placed in irons and later handed over to the British military. After a month spent in the Athlit detention camp he was released into the care of the Jewish Agency and went to live on a kibbutz. Two years later, on 13th May 1948, Maurice finally left for Palestine on the liner SS Providence having been provided by the Haganah with false identity papers (Aliyah Dalet) in case of interrogation by the British. He celebrated his eighteenth birthday onboard and arrived in the newly-created State on 22nd May. After a period of

would have been regarded with such a benign attitude by the French police authorities.

The following review of their personal backgrounds goes a long way to explain their roles and extensive influence in the crucial post-war period:

André Blumel (1893-1973)

Born in Paris and descended from an old-established Jewish family in Alsace by the name of Blum, André Blumel became a journalist and lawyer. He was an ardent Socialist militant in the pre-war era. Under his original name of André Blum he worked on the Socialist newspaper Le Populaire and when Léon Blum came to power at the head of the Front Populaire in 1936, he became the Director General of his office. At this point, to avoid confusion and any accusation of nepotism, he changed his name to Blumel. In organising Blum's office, he worked closely with Jules Moch, also a Jew but, like many in his circle, a Frenchman first and foremost. Later, Moch, as a minister in the post-war coalition Government, was to greatly facilitate the task of illegal immigration.

After the occupation of France, Blumel escaped to Spain to avoid arrest by the Gestapo, only to be returned to the Vichy authorities. He spent time in various internment camps in company with other Socialist enemies of the Vichy regime. After two years he managed to escape and join the resistance. At the time Léon Blum was held by the Germans in Buchenwald as a potential exchange prisoner for equally eminent Germans in British hands. Fearing for his safety -Léon Blum was Jewish after all- it was decided, by the Socialist underground, to send Blumel to London to find ways of effecting his release. He was received by Herbert Morrison, then at the Home Office and also by Anthony Eden. They promised to find a military solution but this never came to fruition. He also approached Chaim Weizmann, the President of the Jewish Agency, whom he knew from before the war, with a request for a large sum to be made available to be used as a bribe. He was directed by Weizmann to a Jewish banker in New York and there, with the consent of the Secretary of the Treasury, funds were collected for the purpose but again to no avail. Léon Blum was only released at the end of the war.

initial military training he was posted to the Palmach, Israel's shock-troops, and saw action near Jerusalem against the Jordanians and in the Sinai against the Egyptians.

In the first provisional Government set up by General De Gaulle in September 1944, Blumel was appointed Director General of the Office of the Interior Minister Adrien Tixier but a year later he left government service to take up his profession at the Paris Bar. It was in his capacity as 'Maître Blumel' that he was often asked to represent members of the Haganah, the Irgun or the Stern group, when they were caught by the French police in illegal operations, frequently connected with the hoarding of weapons for shipment to Palestine or operating clandestine radio transmitters.²² It is clear that, as a result of his close and ongoing relationships with Socialist Ministers in the government, Blumel was always in a pivotal position to use his influence whenever the Mossad or other Palestinian groups upset the French bureaucracy.

In May 1947 he set out, under the umbrella of the French Zionist Federation, to create the 'Union Sioniste de France' which would represent native French Zionists. Like himself, they were not completely at ease with the existing immigrant Zionist parties, whose political loyalty lay with their sister parties in the Yishuv. Although an ardent Socialist, Blumel, unlike Jarblum had no affinity with the Mapai party or any other that was Palestine-based and was never part of the inner circle around Ben Gurion.²³ Dismayed by what they saw as an attempt to introduce a new element into French Zionist politics, each existing Zionist faction signed a petition, politely asking Blumel to desist from creating a constitution and a central committee for this new entity, but in the end to no avail.²⁴

During Blumel's visit to Palestine in April 1946 in company with Joseph Fischer, former director of The Jewish National Fund, and Léon Meiss, President of the Consistoire Central, the central rabbinical authority, his important connections with Government circles afforded him and his companions red-carpet treatment by the Consulate General.²⁵ He was even allowed to use French diplomatic channels to convey a message from Chaim Weizmann to Léon Blum, then in Washington. The

²² CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/49, Translation of an article in Ma'ariv (Israeli daily) by Dr. David Lazare, 14.7.61.

²³ Interview with French historian Philippe Boukara, 6.10.04

²⁴ CZA, Jewish Agency Offices in Paris, L10/146, Letter to Blumel signed by Hashomer Hatsair, Mizrahi, General Zionists, Jewish Workers Party (Poalei-Zion) and the United Revisionist Party, 12.5.47

²⁵ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, carton 72. Telegramme from MAE, sous-Direction du Levant à Consul Général de France, Jerusalem, 10.4.46

essence of the message was to implore the Americans to prevail upon the British to issue 100,000 entry certificates to Palestine without pre-conditions.²⁶

Fischer's success in convincing Blumel and Meiss to accompany him to Palestine was significant for its recognition of the place that Zionism was now taking in French Jewish circles. This was a great departure from the pre-war attitude of the Consistoire which insisted that French Jews direct their loyalty and patriotism exclusively towards France, their only homeland. It was then totally opposed to supporting Zionist objectives.²⁷

Although not as close as Marc Jarblum to the Mapai leadership in Palestine, Blumel was co-opted as a member of the political office of the Jewish Agency in Paris.²⁸ In later years, Blumel's Presidency of the France/USSR Friendship League brought him into conflict with French and Israeli Zionists. Forced to decide between the French Zionist Federation and the League, he chose the latter as he felt he could use his Russian contacts to improve the situation of the Jews in Russia. Having become an avowed admirer of the Soviet Union, Blumel was then considered a Communist fellow traveller²⁹ and was avoided by his former Zionist friends.³⁰ Nevertheless, despite their political differences, he strove to maintain the friendship of Marc Jarblum, to whom he owed a debt of gratitude for his help during the war.³¹

Blumel's profile was enhanced by the Exodus affair in July 1947 (See Chapter 7), when he was delegated by the Minister of the Interior, Edouard Depreux, to represent the Ministry to the immigrants who had been brought back to French waters by the British. Some 15 years later, dismayed that a recent book and film on the subject had failed to emphasise France's role in the affair, he decided to write his own work, entitled "La Véritable Histoire de l'Exodus". To this end he obtained from the Ministry of the Interior a number of relevant documents.³² Unfortunately, although Blumel completed the manuscript in 1963, it was never published.³³

²⁶ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, Neuville [Consul-Général] to MAE, Levant, 3.5.46.

²⁷ Adam Rayski, *Le Choix des Juifs sous Vichy* (Paris, 1992), 335.

²⁸ CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/26. Letter from Jarblum to Zionist office in London, 27.10.45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, A426/49 Translation of article by Dr. David Lazare in *Ma'ariv*, 14.7.61.

³⁰ CZA, Jarblum Papers, A303A/16 Letter from P.A. Gilbert to Marc Jarblum in Israel 8.9.69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Letter from Blumel to Jarblum, 16.9.69.

³² Archives Nationales, F7/16089, Letter from André Blumel to Minister of the Interior, 19.9.62. Subsequently the Director General of the Sûreté Nationale gave a favourable response to Blumel's request, 3.10.63. The internal documents obtained by Blumel were initially the very few that gave some indication of the Government's attitude towards illegal immigration. Fortunately his former legal partner made them available to researchers after Blumel's death in 1973.

³³ CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/46, Letter from Blumel to Jarblum in Israel, 23.10.63. "I have finished the 'Exodus', I must now find a publisher.."

Found amongst his papers was a dedication to Edouard Depreux. This he had intended to include in his book to reflect his contribution in the Exodus affair :

“To Edouard Depreux, Socialist Minister, non-Jewish free-thinker, who was the prime instigator of the French Government’s steadfastness”.³⁴

Marc Jarblum (1887-1972)

With a background totally dissimilar from that of Blumel - he was after all a Yiddish speaking Jew from Warsaw, who spoke French with a heavy accent - Marc Jarblum nevertheless became one of the foremost Zionist personalities on the French scene. He became a member of the executive of the World Zionist Organisation and in 1937 was elected president of the FSJF. This movement, as opposed to the Jewish communists, became, under his influence favourably disposed towards Zionism.³⁵

Originally he was one of the founding members with Ben Gurion of Poalei-Zion in Poland and whilst Ben Gurion made his way to Palestine, Jarblum, in 1907 moved to Paris and took up journalism. In the 1930s he obtained a law degree and was the foreign correspondent of newspapers as far away as Warsaw, Buenos Aires and Tel Aviv. He very soon entered the circle of Léon Blum and when the latter took over as leader of the SFIO in 1920, after the Communists departed and set up their own party, he took up SFIO membership. Amongst other Zionist and non-Zionist immigrants he was instrumental in raising funds for the SFIO and for its newspaper Le Populaire, a practice which continued during and after the war. Even as late as 1951 he provided funds to assist the electoral chances of the Socialists.³⁶

His relationship with Léon Blum became one of long standing and enabled him to arrange discreet meetings between Léon Blum and Zionist personalities such as Chaim Weizmann. Sharing a similar vision that the British would eventually accept a Jewish State as the natural consequence of the Balfour Declaration, both men developed a very high regard for each other and met on many occasions, often at Jarblum’s flat. Jarblum and his wife also accommodated Ben Gurion when he visited Paris during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷

³⁴ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, File 123/Blumel/1, undated front page of manuscript.

³⁵ Philippe Boukara , “L’Ami Parisien: Les Relations Politiques et Personnelles entre David Ben Gourion et Marc Jarblum » in Benjamin Pinkus and Doris Bensimon, eds., Actes du Colloque International : Les Juifs de France, le Sionisme et l’Etat d’Israël (Paris, 1987), 161.

³⁶ CZA, Jarblum Papers, A303/16, Letter from Guy Mollet, deputy Prime Minister to Jarblum thanking him for his financial assistance to the election campaign in his constituency, 29.6.51.

³⁷ Interview with Philippe Boukara, 6.10.04.

In 1940, with the arrival of German troops in the capital, Jarblum, in common with the majority of Jewish leaders moved south into the Free Zone. He became the representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (The Joint) and conveyed its funds to various Jewish relief organisations and also to members of the SFIO as well. At the end of 1942, after the occupation of the Free Zone, he was asked by the Jewish Resistance Movement (OJC) to cross the frontier into Switzerland.³⁸ From Geneva he continued to supply "Joint" funds to all the Jewish resistance movements. Blumel was also reliant on this material assistance whilst he lived under an assumed name in Paris in the spring of 1944.³⁹

Soon after his return to Paris after the war Jarblum was requested by both Weizmann and Ben Gurion to be the Agency's representative to the French authorities.⁴⁰ Subsequently he coupled his membership of the Paris Political Committee of the Jewish Agency with the presidency of the "Fédération des Sionistes de France" with its 20,000 members.⁴¹

He was also the official delegate in France of the Socialist Committee for the Working Class in Palestine. It was in this capacity that he attended the World Trade Unionists' International Conference in Paris in October 1945. At a dinner for the delegates given by General de Gaulle, Jarblum was given the opportunity of discussing with the General the situation in Palestine following the British refusal to allow unlimited immigration and the creation of a Jewish state. Although De Gaulle did not commit himself to the Zionist cause, he did envisage a situation where a Jewish State, once formed, would need certain guarantees as to its continued existence, given the Arab states on its borders. He saw similarities with the predicament of the Christians in Lebanon, following France's forced departure from the area. He assured Jarblum that France "would remain faithful to its task and its commitments".⁴² In the event, just three months later, De Gaulle resigned from the

³⁸ Yad Tabenkin Archives- Avraham Polonski Files, report on l'Organisation Juive de Combat. [Also known as L'Armée Juive]

³⁹ CZA Jarblum Papers, A303/16, Letter from "Fleuret" [alias Blumel] to Jarblum, Paris, 23.5.44. Whilst thanking Jarblum for being such a generous friend to him, Blumel complains of the delays in funds reaching him.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, A303/20/21 Letter from Weizmann in London to Jarblum, 16.10.44 and telegramme from Ben Gurion in Jerusalem to Jarblum, 20.10.44.

⁴¹ TNA CO 537/1705. CID report 28.5.46.

⁴² CZA, Jarblum Papers, A303A/20, Note on conversation with de Gaulle sent to Weizmann, 9.10.45. Jarblum emphasised to Weizmann the need to intensify political contacts in France both within the Government and outside.

Provisional Government and thereafter had no influence on policies towards Palestine, until his return as French President in 1958.

Jarblum's close relationship with Léon Blum and the services that he had rendered him in the past, enabled him to call upon Blum's goodwill, whenever a difficult situation arose. In September 1945 he wrote to Blum, prior to the latter's visit to London, to ask him to convey to Attlee and Bevin "our English friends" the need for a speedy solution to the problem of the DPs in the camps by opening the doors of Palestine.⁴³

In June 1946 discussions between Britain and the Jewish Agency were on the verge of breakdown, following the British failure to support the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry into the Jewish refugee problem. At this juncture, Jarblum interceded with Léon Blum to use his influence with Attlee and Bevin as quickly as possible. Jarblum noted that even Weizmann, usually so prudent in his criticisms, was depressed by Bevin's latest speech on the subject and warned of the danger of serious problems in Palestine unless current British policy was reversed.⁴⁴ In the event, Blum's influence was of no avail as nine days later the colonial administration in Palestine took repressive action against the Jewish Agency and all para-military organisations.

During Léon Blum's brief tenure of the Premiership, Jarblum took the opportunity, in January 1947, to introduce Ben Gurion to him so that he could present his viewpoint on Britain's proposals for a settlement of the Palestine problem. This meeting reflected Ben Gurion's enhanced status in the Zionist political leadership. In the previous month, at the 22nd Congress of the World Zionist Organisation in Basle, he had effectively replaced Chaim Weizmann at the head of the Jewish Agency.⁴⁵

Throughout the immediate post-war period Jarblum worked closely with André Blumel and also used his influence with Socialist Ministers to advance the Zionist cause and the work of the Mossad.⁴⁶ His close friendship with Edouard Depreux, the Minister of the Interior, enabled him to intervene effectively at the time of the Exodus affair in July 1947. He emigrated to Israel in 1954 but, having no

⁴³ CZA, Jarblum Papers., Letter from Jarblum to Blum, 10.9.45.

⁴⁴ Archives Nationales, Fonds Léon Blum, 570AP25, letter from Jarblum to Blum, 20.6.46.

⁴⁵ Archives Nationales, F1a/4743, RG report, 30.12.46.

⁴⁶ Hadari, Second Exodus, 148.

political base in the country, was never appointed to a position which reflected the prestige he had acquired as one of the foremost Zionist leaders in France.⁴⁷

L'Abbé Alexandre Glasberg (1902-1981)

The third intermediary of some importance, Alexandre Glasberg was, as a Catholic priest, possibly the most unlikely recruit to the Zionist cause. His adherence was brought about by Marc Jarblum, who introduced him to the Mossad's representative in Paris, Ehud Avriel, as an individual who was particularly concerned for the welfare of refugees and was noted for his war-time work in the Resistance.

A Jew converted to Catholicism by his parents in Jitomir (Ukraine), Alexandre Glasberg came to France at the age of 30 to study at a Catholic seminary. He was ordained in 1938.⁴⁸ His initial contact with foreign Jews arose out of his work with Jewish welfare organisations in Vichy's internment camps in southern France. Representing l'Amitié Chrétienne, a Resistance relief organisation created in early 1942, he was particularly effective in August of that year when the first round-up of Jews in the Free Zone by the Vichy regime took place. At the Venissieux fort, where the Jews were taken prior to being transported to Drancy for deportation to Auschwitz, he managed, as part of a hastily appointed screening team, to extricate 108 children under the age of 16, sometimes in the face of parental opposition. When the local Vichy préfet wanted to retrieve the children, Glasberg sought the help of Cardinal Gerlier, the chief Primate of France, who agreed to take the children under his protection.⁴⁹ Thereafter Glasberg's efforts during his time in the Resistance was directed towards the rescue of Jewish children. The Germans, failing to apprehend him, condemned him to death in his absence. Under the false name of "Corvin" he continued to escape their clutches. However his brother, Vila, mistaken by the Gestapo for Alexandre, was less fortunate.

After the war, Glasberg presided over a refugee aid organisation, the Conseil Interoeuvres de l'Aide aux Emigrants et Transitaires Juifs (CIATJ). This Agency was the coordinating committee set up by some 17 Jewish organisations to process

⁴⁷ Interview with Philippe Boukara, 6.10.04.

⁴⁸ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 147.

⁴⁹ Annie Latour, *La Résistance Juive en France, 1940-1944*, (Paris, 1970), 58/60. For further analysis on the rescue of Jewish children see: Lucien Lazare, *Rescue as Resistance: How Jewish Organisations Fought the Holocaust in France* (New York, 1996).

applications for visas for Jews from Poland wishing to transit through France.

Glasberg was now a committed Zionist and an agent of the Mossad.

Amongst other code names he was referred to, in the Mossad's secret radio transmissions, as "HaKomer" (The Priest). He used his influence with Marcel Pagès, the head of the Direction de la Réglementation et des Étrangers (Aliens office), to convince him to facilitate the Mossad's work in illegal immigration. Pagès's reverence for biblical stories concerning the destiny of the Jews is suggested as having been the key to Glasberg acquiring the support of this particularly highly-placed French civil servant.⁵⁰

Glasberg, as a recruit to the Mossad, was one of their best assets as his vocation as a Catholic priest removed him from all suspicion and afforded him freedom of movement and access to leading French personalities. The plight of all refugees and Jewish refugees in particular was what motivated his actions, even if they courted illegality. According to his former colleagues in the Mossad he was a fervent Zionist and supporter of a left-wing Jewish state in Palestine.⁵¹ When the Haganah decided to mobilise the Jewish youth of Europe in early 1948, Glasberg undertook a mission to Poland with Ze'ev Hadari to evaluate the possible levels of recruitment. As a result, one thousand Jews were trained in two camps opened by the Polish Secret Service and were then allowed to leave the country. Again he was involved with the DST in procuring arms from the French arsenals, which were shipped to Palestine from Toulon before the creation of the State (See also Chapter 8).

In March 1948 he travelled to Palestine, on a British visa, ostensibly to review the situation of refugees on behalf of the Archbishop of Paris. In reality, however, he was hosted by the Mossad and taken on a tour of the kibbutzim and rural educational establishments. Whilst in the country he was invited to Jerusalem, then under Arab attack, by David Shaltiel, the local commander of the Haganah. They had met three years previously in Paris when Shaltiel represented the Jewish Agency. Shaltiel's objective was to establish a liaison network with the Catholic clergy in the city, a task for which Glasberg was well suited. Accompanied by a Mossad emissary, Arie Eliav, Glasberg undertook the journey on 15th April and despite encountering heavy fire en route managed to reach the city. Within two days Glasberg had succeeded in establishing a rapport between eminent Catholic priests and Shaltiel. With no little

⁵⁰ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 149.

⁵¹ Lucien Lazare, *L'Abbé Glasberg*, (Paris, 1990), 87. Hereafter Lucien Lazare, *L'Abbé Glasberg*.

difficulty he then managed to return to France, thanks to the help of the French Consul-General, de Neuville.⁵²

Glasberg's continued involvement with the Mossad and the rescue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries after the creation of the State is another story, but there is no doubting the value of his contribution to illegal immigration as later chapters will illustrate.⁵³ Later reports by the Renseignements Généraux (Political Police) refer to his far-left political leanings and his visits to Communist countries. At one stage, he was even suspected by the SDCE (External counter-espionage agency) of being an agent of the Kominform.⁵⁴

1.3 Other influential lobbyists

Aside from matters concerned with illegal immigration, with which it denied any official connection, the Jewish Agency in Paris also pursued a more strictly political agenda. In this respect it could call on the good services of Léon Blum, Marc Jarblum and André Blumel and other heads of the community to act as a Zionist lobby whenever French Government policy was vacillating on issues of direct concern to the Yishuv.⁵⁵ A prime example of this is the meeting held with the President of the Republic and titular head of the Government, Vincent Auriol, over the issue of the forthcoming Partition vote in the UN General Assembly. The meeting at the Elysée Palace was attended by the foremost leaders of the Jewish community. The purpose was to prevent a proposed abstention by the French delegation at the UN when the issue came to a vote in November 1947.⁵⁶

Another aspect of Jewish Agency activity was to ensure that Government Ministers of the Jewish faith were kept informed of unwelcome policy initiatives linked to Palestine, which usually emanated from the Ministry of Foreign affairs. It

⁵² Lucien Lazare, *L'Abbé Glasberg* 102/3.

⁵³ In January 2004, belatedly recognising their rescue work with Jewish children during the war, the Yad Vashem Authorities in Jerusalem awarded the medal of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' to the two Glasberg brothers, Alexandre and Vila (the latter was deported in 1943).

⁵⁴ Archives Nationales, F7/16107, RG report, 12.12.55.

⁵⁵ In Jewish circles, according to Philippe Boukara, these three gentlemen were known collectively in Yiddish as "di drei blumen" ("The three flowers").

⁵⁶ Archives Nationales, Fonds René Mayer, 363AP36, Note Verbale to French Government from Léon Meiss, President of CRIF, René Cassin, President of the Alliance Universelle Israélite, Marc Jarblum, President of the FSJF and André Blumel, President of the Union Sioniste de France, 21.10.47.

is clear from documents in the archives of René Mayer, member of the French UN delegation and later Minister of Finance, that he was an active Zionist lobbyist.⁵⁷ After the *de facto* recognition of the State of Israel By France in January 1949, Maurice Fischer, the Paris representative of the Provisional Government wrote to him in recognition of his efforts, both in and out of government, to intercede on behalf of the Zionist cause. In this letter Fischer diplomatically acknowledged that Mayer's earlier caution in pressing for recognition was largely dictated by France's fear of adverse reaction from its North African possessions.⁵⁸

Another Minister who was lobbied, albeit indirectly, by the Jewish Agency was Daniel Mayer, Minister of Work and Social Security. In this instance, Fischer maintained an informal contact with Mayer's wife, Cletta, who worked under Jarblum at the FSJF. Originally from Romania, she had arrived in France in 1925 and threw herself into the activities of the Young Socialists. It was here that she met Daniel Mayer. She was active during the war in secretly removing Jewish children from internment camps in the south of France. She was also involved in reactivating the clandestine Socialist party and launching its newspaper Le Populaire. Fischer's letters to Cletta Mayer covering such subjects as the Partition vote and the recognition by France of the State of Israel, once included the request: "For reasons of confidentiality I am sending you two pieces of information which please convey to Mr. Mayer.....".⁵⁹ The clear intention was to encourage her husband to use his influence in Cabinet meetings in favour of Israel.

These examples of lobbying activity in France on behalf of the Zionist cause provide further evidence of the extent to which the emissaries of the Yishuv managed, through judicious use of friendly contacts, to make their case heard in the highest realms of the French political establishment.

⁵⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds René Mayer, 363AP36, Letter from René Mayer to Georges Bidault, protesting about proposal for France to abstain in Palestine Partition vote, 20.10.47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Letter from Maurice Fischer to René Mayer, 27.1.49.

⁵⁹ Archives of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Fonds Cletta et Daniel Mayer, 3MA15, Letter from Fischer to Cletta Mayer regarding confidential proposals made by R. Schuman (Minister of Foreign Affairs) to Egypt, as revealed by Arab sources, 15.11.48.

CHAPTER 2 Coalition Politics in Post-war France

The problems facing France in the immediate post-war era were enormous. War damage had severely depleted France's transport systems by at least two thirds and destroyed thousands of its road and rail bridges together with 80% of its port facilities, to say nothing of the massive destruction of its means of production.¹ To resolve these problems, whilst dealing with the political vacuum left by the demise of the Vichy Regime, a Provisional Government was set up by General de Gaulle into which he brought all the parties which had been active in the Resistance or the Free French Forces.

With his resignation in January 1946 and as no individual party could hope to attain a majority in the National Assembly, these political parties determined to carry on by establishing a coalition Government. Thereafter, Cabinets reflected inertia and tended to avoid contentious issues as consensus on any government programme was difficult to achieve. In the period under review, the coalition system was maintained throughout, although the complexion of the governments changed. Individual parties strengthened or weakened according to the results at the elections, which were carried out under the proportional representation system. The National Assembly tended to be obstructive and adept at creating ministerial crises, bringing down Prime Ministers and then vacillating over prospective candidates for the post. In the period September 1944 to July 1948 alone, eight Cabinets succeeded each other. This state of chaos in politics was alleviated by a capable civil service which quietly moved things along.²

It has been argued that the very nature of the post-war coalition governments with their internal dissensions and suspicions enabled individual Ministers, often in the interests of their own parties, to develop their own partisan policies without recourse to Cabinet consent or supervision.³ Each party "colonised" the ministries for which it was responsible by placing civil servants with the same political outlook in the most important functions.⁴ Often these civil servants, highly motivated

¹ Jean-Jacques Becker, *Histoire Politique de la France depuis 1945* (Paris, 2003), 35. Hereafter Becker.

² Sylvia Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1974), 36.

³ Georgette Elgey, *Histoire de la IV^e République 1^{ère} Partie: la République des Illusions, 1945-1951*, (Paris, 1993), 162.

⁴ Becker, 35.

bureaucrats and technocrats, developed policies of their own to which their Ministers gave their unofficial blessing, rather than seeking Cabinet approval. This to some extent explains the overall political context in which a few determined Socialist Ministers, acting in concert with trusted officials, could provide the Mossad with a secure environment in which it could operate effectively on French soil.

2.1. The effects of Tripartism

Such was the equality of strength of the three main parties within the coalition that they could only form a government on the basis of a tripartite arrangement. In the October 1945 election to create a Constituent Assembly, the dominant party was the French Communist Party (PCF) with 159 seats (26% of votes); followed by the Popular Republican Movement (MRP), a party created in November 1944 by anti-clerical Catholic intellectuals, with 150 seats; and the Socialist Party (SFIO) with 146 seats. Other parties such as the Moderates, the Radical Socialists and the Democratic and Socialist Union of the Resistance (UDSR) together held only 124 seats, whilst independents held 7 seats.⁵ After the elections, General de Gaulle was elected by the main parties to head the Provisional Government but, failing to impose his authority, he resigned on 20th January 1946. He later set up a new party, Rassemblement du Peuple Français (Rally of the French People) which had a landslide victory in the municipal elections in 1947. However he had no direct say in Government policies until his return to power as Prime Minister and then President in 1958.

The first coalition Government after the departure of de Gaulle was led by the Socialist Félix Gouin and lasted until 12th June 1946. Then a new election for a Constituent Assembly increased the number of MRP seats and this led to Georges Bidault taking over the Premiership. His tenure lasted until November 1946.⁶

Despite these frequent changes, the governments were always composed of nearly equal numbers of Communist, MRP and Socialist Ministers. Crucially, the latter consistently held the portfolios which most directly affected the operations of the Mossad in France, namely that of the Ministry of the Interior (Edouard Depreux), which controlled the police forces, and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (Jules Moch), which controlled the ports. Because of its control over foreign policy,

⁵ Becker, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

the next most influential party in the coalition was the MRP. Through its leader in the cabinet, Georges Bidault, it exercised, except for a one month period, a continual monopoly over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1945 to 1948.⁷ This was the only Ministry which consistently challenged the Socialist ministers in the matter of illegal immigration.

The provisional nature of the Governments which had continued since May 1945 came to an end with the general election to the first National Assembly of November 1946. For the first time, the Socialist bloc made up of the SFIO and the PCF did not receive a clear majority of the votes cast. As ever, the three parties were destined to maintain their coalition. Both the leaders of the Communist Party and the MRP failed to gain approval from the National Assembly to take over the premiership. So it was Léon Blum who was charged with maintaining a caretaker government for one month until a President was elected. On 16th January 1947, the Fourth Republic came into being with the appointment of Vincent Auriol as President of France. He asked a fellow Socialist, Paul Ramadier, to form a new government. Despite the poor showing of the Socialists in the elections, they were granted nine of the ministerial portfolios with five going to the MRP and five to the Communists. Other parties picked up six portfolios.⁸

During these early post-war years, the coalition governments had to contend with an infrastructure largely destroyed during the war, the nationalisation of its major industries, the lack of food (rationing was only abolished in 1949), rampant inflation and low salaries causing social unrest. Externally, France was engaged in a debilitating war to maintain control of Indo-China. There was also the unresolved problem of how to deal with Germany, where the Soviet Union was flexing its muscles.⁹

In May 1947 the Communist Ministers and Deputies voted against the Government's policy to restrict pay rises. The Communist ministers were then summarily expelled from the Government. Six months later a series of strikes

⁷ Archives Nationales, F1a/4742, Renseignements Généraux reports October 1946/April 1947. It was suggested, in one of these reports, that it was the Communists who insisted on Bidault remaining at the MAE to avoid the appointment of a Socialist. This was in order to prevent the negotiation of an Anglo/French Treaty which, had there been a Socialist Minister at the MAE, might have been envisaged. In the event during the short one month period (December 1946 /January 1947) that Léon Blum held the Ministry of Foreign Affairs portfolio as well as that of the Premiership, such a treaty was indeed launched and later signed when Bidault returned to the MAE.

⁸ Becker, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36 and 43.

launched by the Communist trade unions put Ramadier's Government under extreme pressure. On 19th November the Premiership passed to the MRP's Robert Schuman and this effectively marked the end of tripartism. Although Depreux then left the Cabinet he was replaced at the Ministry of the Interior by Jules Moch, who energetically faced down what appeared to be a Communist insurrection. In turn, Moch's previous portfolio passed to another Socialist, Christian Pineau.¹⁰

Throughout all these years of political and social unrest, the Mossad was reassured by the fact that their friends in cabinet continued to occupy those Government positions, which afforded protective cover for their work.

2.2 Attitudes within the Socialist Party (SFIO) towards Zionism

Among the Socialist Ministers of the post-war coalition Governments, the two who were regarded as virtual guardian angels by the Mossad, headquartered in Paris, were Edouard Depreux and Jules Moch. Both maintained close relationships, through their officials, with the official Zionist leadership, Marc Jarblum and André Blumel. They in turn acted as the Mossad's intermediaries, whenever a bureaucratic obstacle had to be removed.

Léon Blum who had returned from deportation in May 1945, remained the head of the Party and, except for one brief period, remained outside Government. Nevertheless, his influence on Socialist Ministers, and most especially on matters concerned with Palestine, continued to be profound. One of his greatest disappointments was his failure to persuade Attlee, whom he greatly admired, to change the British Government's policy on Palestine. One of his greatest achievements was to use his influence to sway the French Cabinet, despite Bidault's opposition, in favour of the Partition vote on Palestine.

Within the SFIO itself, the pro-Zionist attitudes of those appointed Government Ministers, were not necessarily shared by others on its Directorate. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the subject of illegal immigration does not appear at all in the minutes of its "Comité Directeur". As an example, the arrival of the refugees from the Exodus at Port-de-Bouc on 29th July 1947, a major feature in that day's press, is not mentioned at all in the minutes of 30th July; rather they

¹⁰ Becker, 50.

concentrate on bilateral relations with the British Labour Party.¹¹ Considering that Edouard Depreux was the Government Minister most involved in issuing instructions for the reception of the refugees, the apparent lack of discussion on this topic appears highly unusual.

Indeed as Socialists, not only was the SFIO conscious of the need for solidarity with the British workers but also with Arab workers in France's North African possessions. Another negative element from the Zionist point of view was the considerable influence that the non-Zionist Bund (Jewish Social Democrat Union) wielded over European Socialists. This tended to counterbalance that of the Palestinian Socialists at international Socialist conferences. Not that the Bund was against the immigration of Jews to Palestine but it believed that Palestine was not the only answer to the Jewish problem. Some SFIO members adopted this Bundist line.¹²

These factors explain to some extent the dilemma faced by the Jewish members on the Directorate as to how far they could promote Zionism, without being accused of partisanship by their colleagues. In the event, Daniel Mayer was voted out of his position as Secretary General at the SFIO congress in August 1946. Léon Blum, the head of the Party, thus lost his most effective acolyte. It was Léon Boutbien, a fervent anti-Zionist on the Directorate, who was instrumental in removing Daniel Mayer from his post and replacing him with Guy Mollet. He spoke of the previous "Jewish majority" and its partisan approach, which certain SFIO members disapproved of. This criticism was furiously rebutted by the Jewish members.¹³

In October 1946 Guy Mollet participated at a pro-Zionist meeting to protest against the internment of Jews in Cyprus. At least officially, the SFIO appeared in favour of the emigration of Jews to Palestine.¹⁴ Léon Blum remained at the head of the SFIO but, in practice it was now under new management. For many of Blum's

¹¹ Archives de L'Office Universitaire de Recherche Socialiste (Hereafter Archives de L'ours), Minutes of Comité Directeur, 30.7.47.

¹²Philippe Moine, Les Socialistes Français devant le Mouvement Sioniste et la Création de l'Etat d'Israël, 1945-1949, Mémoire de DEA (Dissertation) (Paris, 1993), 88. The ideology of the Bund, its contribution to the Resistance during the war and its attitude to Zionism is worthy of a separate and extensive study. Today its library and its classes for the study of Yiddish as a living language are situated at the Maison de la culture yiddish-Bibliothèque Medem in Paris.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

supporters the nature of the Party became quite distinct from that which, forged in the Résistance years, emerged as a unifying force after the war.¹⁵

The rumbling conflict within the directorate of the SFIO over the question of Palestine was finally laid bare a few days after the creation of the State of Israel.

At a meeting of the Directorate on 19th May 1948, the subject was debated openly and recorded in the minutes. Guy Mollet raised the question of the SFIO's attitude to the recognition of Israel. Should the Directorate accept the Party's International Commission recommendation for recognition? The most direct opposition was led, not unexpectedly, by Boutbien, who generally adopted an anti-Zionist line

It would be a political error to unconditionally recognise the State of Israel. We shouldn't approve a nationalist movement. Whilst having public sympathy for the Jews, we have to say that the Arab claims are legitimate. In the present situation it would be dangerous to recognise the State of Israel... We have to find a means to unite the Arabs and the Jews.

A different view was presented by Grumbach who underlined the Socialist party's acclaim of the UN partition decision. In his view the greatest mistake for France would be to hesitate and lose the goodwill of the Jews without, by the same token, gaining that of the Arabs. After a number of other contributions, the Directorate voted unanimously to invite the French Government to recognise, without delay, the new State of Israel.¹⁶ Daniel Mayer, although present at the meeting, deliberately abstained from presenting his views. As a Minister of the Government he presumably found it judicious not to intervene in the debate.

¹⁵ Idith Zertal, "Fraternité Oblige; La SFIO et le Sionisme", in Benjamin Pinkus and Doris Bensimon, eds., *Actes du Colloque International : Le Sionisme et L'Etat d'Israël* (Paris, 1987), 303.

¹⁶ Archives de l'Ours, Minutes of Comité Directeur, 19.5.48. It is interesting to note that despite a similar consensus in the National Assembly, which included the Communists, the MRP, with its control over the MAE, refused to budge on this issue.

CHAPTER 3 The activities of Palestinian emissaries in France

Soon after the end of the war, the Zionist leadership in the Yishuv determined that Paris would provide the best location from which to run official and covert activities in Europe.¹ A point in its favour was the relative proximity of London, where the Jewish Agency could have access to the British Foreign and Colonial offices, in pursuit of its demands concerning Palestine. Furthermore, transit through France would provide a quick route between the DP Camps in Germany and Austria and the ports on the Mediterranean, from where the survivors of the East European Jewish communities, the “She’erit Hapletah” (Surviving Remnant) could be transported to Palestine.² Above all, for reasons which have already been stated, there was a political and social environment in France which was particularly conducive to the covert activities of the Mossad. But first it would have to establish a headquarters operation in Paris. This was finally achieved in the spring of 1946

David Shaltiel was the first Palestinian emissary to arrive in France just before the end of the war. He did so not only with the blessing of the British but with their assistance. His official task as Director of the Palestinian Office of the Jewish Agency was to organise legal Jewish immigration to Palestine. David Ben Gurion himself arrived soon after V.E. day and from that moment on Paris was designated as the centre of the Haganah’s activities in Europe. The ready assistance which the members of the Jewish Resistance group, the Armée Juive (AJ), provided the Mossad, in its early days in Paris, enabled it to set up relatively quickly an efficient infrastructure. Other paramilitary forces in the Yishuv, the Revisionist Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organisation), and the extremist Stern Group also set up their European headquarters in Paris. How then did these various elements set about their tasks in France?

3.1 The Jewish Agency

The first accredited representative of the Jewish Agency in France was David Shaltiel, who arrived on the 27th November 1944.³ He had arrived earlier in neutral Portugal and, given his status, had been flown to London, courtesy of the British Air

¹ Philippe Boukara, « Dans la Mouissance de la ‘Fédération’ (1944-1949) » *Le Monde Juif* (Paris, 1996), 88.

² From a biblical quotation: “For a remnant shall come forth from Jerusalem, survivors from Mount Zion”. 2 Kings 19, 30:31.

Attache in Lisbon.⁴ There, after a visit to the French Embassy, he acquired a visa for France. (See Massigli report, Chapter 1.1) An Agency office was soon opened at 83 Avenue de la Grande Armée, which also housed the “Office Palestinien de France”, to deal specifically with immigration requests. The office also centralised the work of similar offices in Belgium, Holland Germany and Austria.⁵

Within a month or so, Shaltiel had a first contact with Avraham Polonski, Lucien Lublin and Dyka Jefroykin, the former leaders of the AJ. This specifically Jewish resistance movement had been set up at the beginning of 1942 in the Free Zone of France. From the outset it was orientated towards Zionism and incorporated both Revisionist and left-wing tendencies. With the mobilisation of active combat units in November 1943, the AJ, under its original name of l’Organisation Juive de Combat joined elements of the EIF (Jewish Scouting Movement) and the MJS (Young Zionist Movement) in the mountains of Southern France, to harass the Germans. Its other resistance activities consisted of organising the clandestine passage of Jewish children into Switzerland and also across the Pyrenees into Spain en route for Palestine.⁶

Ties with the Jewish Agency already existed, as Polonski was in possession of an agreement with Eliahu Dobkin of the Jewish Agency, which Dyka Jefroykin had signed in Barcelona in July 1944. In this agreement, the AJ accepted to work under the authority of the Jewish Agency.⁷ Despite Shaltiel’s warm words, in which he expressed his respect for their work during the war and later discussions held in the spring of 1945 with Moshe Shertok, these initial contacts were not immediately fruitful. Anne Grynberg argues that the leaders of the AJ were hesitant to commit themselves, particularly because of the political strains existing at the time between the President of the Jewish Agency Chaim Weizmann, whom they greatly respected, and Ben Gurion.⁸

³ TNA, FO 371/42885, Note from Air Ministry to Transport Command, 24.11.44.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Note from Air Ministry to FO, 13.11.44.

⁵ CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/26 Letter from Executive of the Jewish Agency to UNRRA headquarters, 9.1.46.

⁶ Anne Grynberg, « France 1944-1947, Ouvrir les Portes de Sion: de la Résistance Contre le Nazisme à la Solidarité avec Israël » *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, No.90, Automne (Paris, 1987), 15.

⁷ Haganah Archives, Avraham Polonski files, Box 8.3.2.3 Section 123.

⁸ Grynberg, 16.

In February 1945, Shaltiel was joined in Paris by Ruth Kluger, who was to act as his co-Director of the Agency. Within Mossad circles she already had a formidable reputation for her work before and during the war involved with extracting Jews from Eastern Europe. Once in Paris she took on as a priority task the recovery of Jewish children from Christian and other institutions where they had been placed to safeguard them from deportation. In most cases they were now orphans and initially they were placed in centres run by Jewish communal organisations. Where they remained unclaimed by surviving relatives, the Jewish agency set about organising their transport to Palestine.⁹

Kluger's charisma and attractive personality gained her the support of many influential people particularly within the American military.¹⁰ Exploiting her contacts at USFET headquarters (United States Forces European Theatre), she was allocated a number of berths on a troopship bound for the Middle East. Four hundred and three children, accompanied by the American Red Cross were checked by Kluger onto the *Ascanius* in Marseilles on 8th July 1945. In Naples they were trans-shipped onto another troop-ship, the *Mataroa*, and were joined by other Jewish refugees. In all 1,196 immigrants disembarked in Haifa on 15th July. They were then taken to the Athlit camp for processing and subsequently released into the care of the Jewish Agency. In September 1945, the *Mataroa* returned with a further 991 Jewish refugees, including 228 children. Many of these boys and girls under the age of 16 had survived concentration camps such as Buchenwald.¹¹ According to Ehud Avriel, these arrivals were considered by the British to be illegal immigrants. However, in view of the involvement of USFET they decided not to make an issue of this breach of the quota system. Nevertheless they did deduct the number from the quota available in future months.¹² In a sense, Ruth Kluger could be said to have launched illegal immigration from France even before the Mossad established its own headquarters in the French capital.

⁹ Ehud Avriel, *Open the Gates : A Personal Story of 'Illegal' Immigration to Israel* (London, 1975), 252. Hereafter Avriel.

¹⁰ For a limited biography on Ruth Kluger see Ruth Eliav [formerly Kluger] and Peggy Mann, *The last Escape* (London, 1974).

¹¹ AJJDC Archives, File 255, Report by Cordelia Trimble, Field Representative of the American Red Cross, October 1945.

¹² Avriel, 253.

Kluger's area of activity stretched across Europe and in July 1945 she was instrumental in recruiting an American Jewish chaplain, Eugene Lipman, to rescue Jewish refugees held up by the Russians in Prague. In a covert operation involving both American military personnel and the Jewish Brigade, 2,000 Jews were taken across the Danube in groups and driven via Salzburg to Italy. Lipman narrowly escaped being court-martialled for contravening US army regulations.¹³ Kluger had also established strong contacts with the Jewish Brigade, even having an officer and two clerks seconded to her in Paris by its commanding officer, Brigadier Ernest Benjamin.¹⁴

Her high profile had not escaped the attention of the British and when she visited Palestine in January 1946, the CID were there to welcome her. In the event, they only temporarily confiscated the documents she was carrying.¹⁵ An MI5 report mentions the incident

Little is known of the illegal immigration organisation in France, but the head of the Paris office of the Jewish Agency, Ruth Kluger, is known to do all in her power to facilitate the journeys of prominent Zionists and members of the Jewish Agency from Palestine and the UK to the continent, and it has been strongly suspected on more than one occasion that the primary reason for these visits has been in connection with illegal immigration. Mrs. Kluger's baggage was searched when she arrived in Palestine by air on January 1st 1946 and a number of documents were found which indicated her active interest in both legal and illegal schemes for immigration to Palestine from Italy, France and North-West Europe.¹⁶

In practice, accredited officials of the Jewish Agency, although suspected of being involved in activities which British intelligence considered illegal, were not prevented, except in the second half of 1946, from carrying out their official duties whether in Palestine or abroad. The dual function of the Jewish Agency, namely carrying out both legal and illegal activities, was a characteristic of many institutions involved in illegal activities against the British. This was as true of the Joint and even UNRRA working in the Displaced Persons Camps. The British, although fully aware of this phenomenon, seemed completely powerless to intervene.

¹³ Alex Grobman, Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry, 1944-1948 (Detroit, 1993), 114. Hereafter Grobman.

¹⁴ CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/26, Letter from Brigadier Benjamin at Headquarters Jewish Brigade Group, BAOR, 19.12.45.

¹⁵ CZA, Immigration Dept. S6/1657. Receipt dated 20.1.46 signed by Rosenbusch, on behalf of Ruth Kluger, on the return of the 26 documents confiscated from her on 1.1.46.

¹⁶ TNA, FO 371/56239, Report on Illegal Immigration into Palestine, Appendix C, Report by MI5, 8.8.46.

The pioneering work by the two Jewish Agency representatives in Paris represented the first phase of direct Palestinian activity in France. With the arrival of David Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, in May 1945, a new and more intensive phase was set in motion.

Ben Gurion was no stranger to Paris. During the pre-war years he came to France almost once a year to attend meetings of the Zionist Executive or to represent Mapai before the International Socialist Movement. Here, Ben Gurion had one close confidant, his "Parisian Friend" and ardent Zionist, Marc Jarblum, head of the FSJF. Given Ben Gurion's empathy for and connections in France, it is not surprising that he frequently used Paris as his own headquarters in Europe. From here his representatives could use the political connections of Léon Blum, André Blumel and Marc Jarblum to promote the Zionist viewpoint to Socialist Cabinet Ministers like René Mayer, Daniel Mayer and Jules Moch all native Frenchmen of Jewish origin.¹⁷

During his May visit to Paris, Ben Gurion set about re-establishing contact with Jarblum and meeting other French Zionist leaders to explore the possibilities of setting up a range of Haganah activities on French soil.¹⁸ In his meetings with Ruth Kluger and David Shaltiel, Ben Gurion insisted that henceforth they worked closely with Jarblum, whose contacts in the French administration, particularly with the Socialist Ministers, were second to none. Whilst they would keep Jarblum informed on immigration matters he, in turn, would disclose to them all his political activities.¹⁹

It was Ruth Kluger who, anxious to deflect the scepticism about Ben Gurion demonstrated by the three AJ leaders, arranged an hour's meeting between Ben Gurion and Polonski on 18th May 1945.²⁰ After this meeting Ben Gurion noted in his diary that of the original 2,000 operatives in the AJ, 800 had remained in contact. He also noted that some 3000 Jewish youngsters, who for the most part, had lost their parents through deportation, resided in children's homes.²¹ Undoubtedly, in his mind, they would be prime candidates for Zionist education.

¹⁷ Benjamin Pinkus, « Ben Gourion, La France et les Juifs de France » in Benjamin Pinkus and Doris Bensimon, eds., Actes du Colloque International : Les Juifs de France, le Sionisme et L'Etat d'Israël (Paris, 1987), 281.

¹⁸ Idith Zertal, From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel (Berkeley, California, 1998), 77. Hereafter Zertal, Catastrophe.

¹⁹ Tsilla Hershco, Entre Paris et Jerusalem: La France, le Sionisme et la Création de L'Etat d'Israël, 1945-1949 (Paris, 2003), 59. Hereafter Hershco.

²⁰ Grynberg, 16

²¹ Yehuda Ben David, Ha'Haganah Ba'Europa (Tel Aviv, 1995), 261. Hereafter Ben David.

With the war over, the Jewish Agency office in London, relying on the sympathetic attitude of Churchill towards Dr. Weizmann and the Zionist cause, had lost no time in asking the British Government to abandon the 1939 White Paper and allow unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. It set out the following requests for consideration:

1. That Palestine be declared a Jewish State.
2. That the Jewish Agency should be authorised to take to Palestine as many new settlers as possible and to develop all the country's resources.
3. That the transfer of Jews from Europe should be assisted by an international loan.
4. That Germany should pay reparations in kind to the Jewish people for the development of Palestine. As a first instalment, all German property in Palestine to be requisitioned.
5. That all international facilities be provided for the exit and transit from Europe of all Jews who wished to settle in Palestine.

In reporting these demands, the Manchester Guardian gently admonished the Agency for not waiting for the conclusion of the projected peace conference and of disregarding the practical difficulties of their proposals. It pointed out that : "Their acceptance would undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences in the Arab world and upon our relationships and interests within it."²²

In the event, Weizmann was to be disappointed by Churchill's refusal to consider the future of Palestine in advance of a peace conference. Within months, however, Churchill's electoral upset at the first post-war elections seemed to presage a new era for Palestine. This theme was taken up by the Manchester Guardian in its editorial of 31st July, 1945. It expressed the hope that the new Labour Government would " find a solution acceptable to the United Nations which would safeguard the Jewish Home in Palestine and permit the immigration of at least a portion of the Jews of Europe."²³ Perhaps more surprisingly and with great prescience, the editorial went on to recognise that this might only be achieved by partition and the creation of a small but independent Jewish State. The record shows that it was to take another two years of turmoil and indecision for a British Government to be forced, by the United Nations Assembly, to finally accept such a solution.

²² Manchester Guardian, 26.5.45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31.7.45.

With the British Labour Party's accession to power in July 1945, Ben Gurion and the members of the Jewish Agency Executive assembled in London for the opening of the first World Zionist Conference since 1939, felt that at last their hopes would be realised. Their assumption was based on the pro-Zionist stance adopted by the Labour Party since 1939, when they vehemently opposed the White Paper. This illusion was to be shattered in September 1945, when Clement Attlee indicated that the White Paper would continue to be maintained until his Government had finally determined its policy for Palestine.

Arriving in Paris on 29th September 1945, Ben Gurion, now determined to circumvent the continuing restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, telegrammed the political head of the Haganah, Moshe Sneh, to launch military actions against the British in Palestine. He also ordered his colleagues in Palestine to despatch to Paris both the head of the Mossad, Shaul Meirov and his second in command, Ehud Avriel, to organise both Aliyah Bet and Aliyah Gimmel.²⁴

As a next step he sought out Polonski to determine the sort of assistance he could render to the Haganah in France. Since his first visit he had already received from Polonski a full and confidential report on the work of the AJ during the war. In his covering letter Polonski had expressed the hope of discussing with Ben Gurion the nature of the AJ's future activities.²⁵ By now the AJ had overcome its earlier misgivings about Ben Gurion and was eager to be of service. Ben Gurion was invited to inaugurate the first transmission of the AJ's secret radio station in Paris, now dedicated to the future needs of the Mossad.²⁶ Polonski also informed Ben Gurion that he was now fully prepared to put at his disposal the skills in forgery, transport and weapons usage which his Resistance organisation had acquired fighting the Germans.

Given that no effective Haganah infrastructure existed in France, Ben Gurion saw the AJ as providing the means to kick start operations. Later in October 1945, writing his report in London, Ben Gurion expressed his hopes for a fruitful collaboration

The important thing I discovered in Paris is the possibility of Aliyah Gimmel, despite the enormous difficulties of training, arms acquisition, transfer and communication. But the essential prerequisites already exist:

²⁴ Zertal, » Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle », 414.

²⁵ Haganah Archives, Polonski files. Box no. 8.3.2.3, Letter from Polonski to David Ben Gurion at Jewish Agency, 77 Great Russell Street, London, 27.8.45.

²⁶ Grynberg, 17.

the willingness of the men; the youth in the camps and the men of the Armée Juive in France, under the leadership of our men from back home, are ready.²⁷

Aliyah Gimmel, referred to Ben Gurion's controversial pre-war suggestion that a special force of young immigrants should be militarily trained before departure from Europe on illegal ships. Then if the British were to oppose their landing in Palestine, they, together with Haganah units already onshore, would take them on. The occurrence of such incidents, with their inherent risk of casualties, Ben Gurion concluded, would have far-reaching positive effects on world opinion, let alone on the British.²⁸ Ben Gurion was soon dissuaded from this particular idea by Israel Galili and Moshe Sneh, respectively the military and political heads of the Haganah. Even the AJ only showed luke-warm support and consequently directed the military training activity of Aliyah Gimmel to more practical ends.²⁹ (See 3.3)

In December 1945 Ehud Avriel was the first senior Mossad emissary to arrive. The following month he went down to Marseilles to meet Shmaria 'Rudi' Zameret, an American, who was the Mossad Station Chief and explained to him that Paris would shortly be the European headquarters of the Mossad. Rudi had already, since his arrival after the end of the war, explored the region to find suitable locations for transit camps. He had rented an estate, previously the property of a French collaborator who was now in prison. It had the benefit of a secluded bay and the main building could house at least 200 refugees. Together with other Mossad operatives in the area he began planning for the first illegal ship to leave France.³⁰

On 11th November 1945, Ben Gurion chaired a conference in Paris of ex-AJ men, men of the Jewish Brigade and members of the Haganah. Marc Jarblum and Ruth Kluger were also present as well as 300 delegates. This marked the incorporation of the AJ into the Haganah under the acronym Matsav (The Diaspora Civil Guards). Soon after, Ben Gurion managed to second Nahum Shadmi, from the Haganah in Palestine, to head the new organisation of the Haganah in Europe. His task was to command the

²⁷ Renée Posnanski, « L'héritage de la Guerre, le Sionisme et la France dans les Années 1944-1947 », in Benjamin Pinkus and Doris Bensimon, eds., *Actes du Colloque International: Les Juifs de France, le Sionisme et l'Etat d'Israël* (Paris, 1987), 258.

²⁸ Dvorah Hacohen, "Ben Gurion and the Second World War: Plans for Mass immigration to Palestine" in *Studies in Contemporary Judaism* No. 7 (New York, 1991), 251.

²⁹ Fritz Liebreich, *Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine 1945-1948* (Oxford, 2005), 181.

³⁰ Avriel, 264.

Haganah members in the Jewish Brigade and to supervise Matsav under Polonski's leadership. He was also to be responsible for coordinating the acquisition of arms, for their eventual transfer to Palestine and to assist the Mossad with its illegal immigration activities. In April 1946 Shadmi nominated Polonski as Haganah Commander for France and North Africa.³¹

Polonski was an essential figure in assisting the various branches of the Haganah to set themselves up in France. His many contacts with former resistance members, now in official positions even within the DST, greatly assisted this process. Also, problems which arose because of the lack of knowledge of the language, culture and customs of France by the European Haganah commander, Nahum Shadmi and the Mossad head, Shaul Meirov, who had finally arrived in May 1946, were easily resolved by his intervention and his perfect knowledge of Hebrew.³²

By now, Ben Gurion could be satisfied that he had accomplished his first task, which was to set up a secret infrastructure in France from which he could confront the British in Palestine. His other task, this time in the political sphere, was to win France's new Provisional Government and public opinion over to the Zionist cause. On 10th November 1945, Jarblum had arranged for him to meet Georges Bidault, then Foreign Minister in de Gaulle's cabinet. Bidault told him that he had passed on to Ernest Bevin de Gaulle's comment that when he was in Palestine he saw that the Jews were the only community that was developing the country.³³

Bidault, Minister of Foreign affairs for most of the period September 1944 to July 1948, was moved to confront his Socialist coalition partners over their pro-Zionist views, whenever he considered the higher interests of France to be at stake. The question of illegal immigration, which often arose during his tenure of office, caused him the most anguish in his relations with Bevin.³⁴ This does not mean, as later events tend to reveal, that he was necessarily opposed to the Zionist enterprise.

Besides the work in their official capacity, both Ruth Kluger and David Shaltiel were also heavily involved with Polonski, then still located in Toulouse, in setting up

³¹ Ben David, 264. The Jewish Agency was concerned that the 475,000 Jews living in the French North African possessions of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria among 19million Arabs could come under attack as Zionist efforts for a Jewish home in Palestine progressed. It was therefore considered necessary for local Jewish self-defence units to be brought to France for training.

³² *Ibid.*,

³³ Pinkus, « Ben Gourion, La France et les Juifs de France », 281.

³⁴ Catherine Nicault, *La France et le Sionisme 1897-1948: Une Rencontre Manquée?* (Paris, 1992), 219.

transit centres for illegal immigration purposes.³⁵ Ruth Kluger also travelled widely in France, visiting Jewish communities and bringing word of events in Palestine.³⁶ This also provided the opportunity to recruit young French Jews to sign up for Haganah activities in France prior to their own Aliyah. (See the case of Israel Avidor referred to later)

After the departure of David Shaltiel, Ruth Kluger was left in sole charge with an increasing work load. In April 1946, just 14 months after her arrival, she indicated to her immediate superior, Eliahu Dobkin, in charge of immigration at the Jewish Agency in Palestine, that she wished to resign. Dobkin's response was not on file. However, in early July he asked Eliezer Kaplan, the Jewish Agency treasurer, then in Paris, to prevail on Kluger to await the arrival of her replacements, E. Najar and A. Goldberg.³⁷

In late July, with no sign that her promised successors were arriving, Kluger revealed, in two detailed and emotional letters to Dobkin, the reasons which had led her to resign. The underlying cause was that her position in Paris had been usurped by the arrival of new officials sent out from Palestine, who refused to accept her authority. In effect, the Paris office was being systematically precluded from overseeing the activities being carried out by emissaries in the other European countries, for which it was responsible. In describing these "boycott and sabotage" activities, Kluger reported that those involved had stated that they would act independently or only accept orders directly from Jerusalem. This chaotic and anarchical situation was further exacerbated by the use of the Paris office as the transit centre for emissaries destined to move on to other countries, ostensibly Germany and Austria and the DP Camps. They often arrived without suitable clothing or visas for their ultimate destination. The approval of the necessary authority to cover the emissaries' living costs were also not forthcoming. Faced with unexpected delays -they had been told the Paris office had everything in hand, which clearly was not the case- the emissaries vented their frustration on Kluger and interrupted the work of her meagre and under-resourced offices in the Avenue de la Grande Armée.³⁸ This contretemps within the Jewish

³⁵ Archives of Yad Tabenkin, Polonski Files, Box no8 File 6, Letter from Polonski to David Shaltiel and Ruth Kluger, 17.7.45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Invitation issued by Organisation Sioniste de France, Toulouse branch, to a meeting to be addressed by Ruth Kluger in Yiddish, 31.5.45.

³⁷ CZA, Immigration Dept., S6/1657. Telegramme from Dobkin to Kaplan at Royal Monceau, 7.7.46.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Letters in English to Eliahu Dobkin from Ruth Kluger, dated 24th and 25th July 1946.

Agency did not spell the end of Ruth Kluger's services in Paris. Despite her warning that she was returning to Palestine on 15th August, she remained until October 1946, to assist Ben Gurion, now in virtual exile, to continue the work of the Executive of the Jewish Agency.³⁹

Ben Gurion's enforced stay in the French capital arose out fear of arrest if he attempted to return to Palestine after the events of 29th June 1946 when British forces in Palestine launched a concerted action against the Jewish Agency and all paramilitary forces. On that "Black Saturday" Ben Gurion was at his usual hotel, the Royal Monceau in Paris, preparing to return to Palestine. His response to events back home was to demand an increase in the illegal immigration traffic, calling for the arrival, off the shores of Palestine, of at least one ship a week.⁴⁰ From this date until the end of 1946 the members of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, who had escaped arrest, held their meetings in Paris.⁴¹

The pretext for the British army's widespread repressive action throughout Palestine, was the havoc caused to its communication lines wreaked by the Palmach twelve days previously. Prior to that there had been many attacks against British forces, largely in response to the failure of the British Government to respond positively to the recommendations of the Anglo-American Commission of Enquiry into Jewish Refugees. In reality, the British operation, prepared months previously, was intended to crush all Jewish para-military activity in Palestine. This note from the High Commissioner for Palestine provides evidence to this effect

In the event of a major outrage, a plan is in existence which includes occupation of the Jewish Agency and detention of selected leaders... following slaughter of soldiers in Tel Aviv (seven soldiers killed on 25th April ..by 20 to 30 Jewish terrorists) there is more strain on troops. Unless Jews disband their armed forces by agreement, action should be taken against them as soon as possible.⁴²

In the countryside, kibbutzim were surrounded and widespread arms searches carried out, sometimes involving civilian casualties. In the towns the inhabitants were screened for Haganah and Irgun members, who were then interned. Members of the Jewish Agency Executive were arrested and taken to the fortress at Latrun, all except

³⁹ Archives Nationales, F1a/3368, RG report, 10.10.46.

⁴⁰ Avriel, 288/292.

⁴¹ Zertal, « Le cinquième Côté du Triangle », 414.

for Dr. Moshe Sneh, the political head of the Haganah, who managed to slip the net and, according to Idith Zertal, was smuggled out of Palestine to France.⁴³ However this version of his escape is open to dispute. In effect, French archival sources reveal that the British had located Sneh but, rather than arrest him and risk unrest, preferred to convince him to leave the country of his own accord. The Jewish Agency duly responded by approaching the French consulate and requesting a visa to France for him. This was granted on the spot.⁴⁴

The comings and goings of Ben Gurion and his entourage at the Hotel Monceau, 37, Avenue Hoche, were noted, on an almost daily basis, by agents of the Renseignements Généraux (French Political Police), who invariably referred in their reports to information supplied by “reliable Jewish circles in the capital.”⁴⁵ These reports illustrate the manner in which the French capital afforded a safe haven in which members of the Jewish Agency could carry on negotiating with the British free of the danger of arrest, which had been their colleagues’ fate in Palestine. For instance, it was revealed that in early June prior to these arrests, Ben Gurion had met the Colonial Secretary, George Hall, in London on two occasions. On one of these he was accompanied by Richard Crossman, a member of the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine. It was during one of these visits that Ben Gurion had cabled the Executive in Palestine in order to intercede for the release of five British officers who had been kidnapped by the Irgun.

Nine days after the second meeting, British forces launched their plan to neutralise the Haganah and the Irgun and arrest members of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. But by then, Ben Gurion was in Paris.⁴⁶ His response and that of the other free Agency members was not long in coming. Despite attempts to keep its discussions

⁴² TNA, Cabinet Papers, CAB 121/644. Alan Cunningham to Secretary of State for Colonies, 29.4.46.

⁴³ Zertal, “Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle”, 414.

⁴⁴ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, Carton 72, Telegramme from de Neuville, the Consular-General to MAE, Direction de l’Afrique-Levant, 16.7.46.

⁴⁵ The extent to which Zionist activities in France, both overt and covert, were under constant surveillance is illustrated by the detailed, but not always entirely accurate, reports of this particular branch of the French police. Behind its seemingly innocuous title “Renseignements Généraux” (General intelligence), there existed (and still exists today) a wide-scale intelligence-gathering organisation which, through hundreds of informers, concentrates its activities on potentially subversive or dubious organisations and individuals within France. Responsible to the head of the Sûreté Nationale in the Ministry of the Interior, the RG maintains offices in each department of France. Each Préfet then has at his disposal the means to investigate any “political organisation or individual” which he deems worthy of attention.

Beyond that, the directorate of the RG frequently issued confidential position papers in which were expressed their considered views on political personalities and events and their relative influence on current affairs.

confidential, it was discovered that at a conference of the Executive in Paris, a resolution was passed to create an independent Jewish State. Initially a small state would be created, but the struggle would then continue to seek its enlargement in Eretz Israel, even in the face of Arab opposition. The political leanings of the new state would be Zionist-Socialist.⁴⁷

On 17th August, the Jewish leaders Stephen Wise, Nahum Goldman and Berl Locker met Ernest Bevin and George Hall, the Colonial Secretary at the Hotel George V in Paris to discuss a Round Table Conference to be held in London with Jewish and Arab delegates.⁴⁸ Subsequently in October an official from the Colonial Office met with Ben Gurion to convince him to attend the London Round Table. He was unsuccessful, given Ben Gurion's conditions, which included the release of the Agency's leaders in Palestine.⁴⁹ There then came a change of Colonial Secretary which seemed to indicate a willingness by the British to compromise. Arthur Creech Jones, Hall's successor, met with Chaim Weizmann and other members of the Agency's Executive in London to discuss a general amnesty of those detained in Palestine.⁵⁰ A few weeks later the liberation was announced of the Jewish leaders in Palestine.⁵¹

Friction developed between Ben Gurion and Weizmann as to how best to respond to the British call for a Round Table Conference on Palestine. The subject was to be finally debated at the 22nd World Zionist Organisation (WZO) Congress in Basle in December 1946. Renseignements Généraux reported that, according to views it had received, if the WZO was in favour of a compromise with the British, which permitted the creation of a viable independent Jewish State, however small, all the Jewish leaders would return to their countries. If the contrary was the case, no leader would return to Eretz Israel, which would signify that Paris would become the Yishuv's temporary diplomatic centre.⁵² In its analysis, the RG foresaw that Weizmann would not be re-elected at the Congress because of the failure of his conciliatory policies towards the British over the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine.⁵³

⁴⁶ Archives Nationales, F1a/3368. RG report, 2.8.46.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.8.46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.8.46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.10.46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.10.46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.11.46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.12.46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.12.46.

At the Congress, 370 delegates participated and among the 2,000 guests invited to attend there were 1,000 representatives from the Holocaust survivors in the DP Camps. As opposed to previous conferences the majority of the delegates came from the USA and Palestine, reflecting the demise of the East European communities.⁵⁴

Weizmann, ignoring the strength of those who opposed his policy vis-a-vis the British, made it a condition of his continued presidency of the Jewish Agency and the WZO that the Agency would unconditionally participate in the proposed London Conference. Furthermore he declared that the principle of partition should be accepted, if it led to the creation of an independent Jewish State.

This ultimatum of Weizmann's created dismay among a number of the delegates, particularly those with a more militant attitude.⁵⁵ When the Congress voted not to attend the London Conference, Weizmann left Basle without standing for re-election. It was a triumph for the policies of Ben Gurion and Abba Hillel Silver, the American Jewish leader. The Congress elected an Action Committee, which in turn elected a new Jewish Agency Executive, presided over by Ben Gurion. Out of respect for Weizmann, the position of president of the two organisations was left vacant. Thereupon Weizmann removed himself from political life, claiming ill-health.⁵⁶

From the Dorchester Hotel in London, where he resided after returning from Basle, Weizmann wrote to Marc Jarblum expressing some of his thoughts after the rejection of his ideas at the Congress. He was particularly disappointed, not only by the behaviour of Abba Silver but also even more by that of Ben Gurion and Moshe Shertok. He characterised the new Executive as resembling not so much a coalition as a Noah's Ark, made up of pure and impure animals, where the latter would gain the upper hand. He suggested to Jarblum the formation of a group of moderates to include Jarblum, André Blumel and Léon Blum.

This new faction would be available if, as he feared, the new Executive clashed seriously with the British Government and chaos and bloodshed ensued in Palestine. Jarblum, using the utmost tact in his reply, counselled patience about the formation of such a group, emphasising the need for all political tendencies to be represented. As to his adherence to such a group, Jarblum referred to his existing membership of the party [Mapai] and to the loyalty that this demanded. In any event he would be canvassing the

⁵⁴ Archives Nationales, RG report, 11.12.46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.12.46.

return of Weizmann as head of their movement.⁵⁷ Clearly Jarblum recognised that Weizmann's day had passed and that the new centre of power lay with Ben Gurion.

In a later report, Renseignements Généraux noted that the proceedings of the Round Table Conference were suspended and that, according to their usual well-informed Jewish circles in Paris, were unlikely to resume. This was because Bevin, in contrast to the Colonial Office, was resolutely opposed to a partition plan for Palestine. Creech Jones envisaged a partition into three zones, one being an Arab state, the other a Jewish state and the third remaining a neutral zone.⁵⁸

One of the more enlightening sections of a Renseignements Généraux report in early 1947, directly concerned itself with illegal immigration. In this report, the French cast themselves purely in the role of passive onlookers. It noted, without at this time any pretence at ignorance or ambiguity, that from the Mediterranean coasts to the Black Sea, boats of varying tonnage and type set sail for Palestine each week. On the one hand, Polish, German, Austrian and Czech Jews transited through French and Italian ports, whilst on the other Jews from Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania transited through Greek and Romanian ports.⁵⁹ Renseignements Généraux showed that it was quite aware of the silent war being waged between the "Jewish organisations" and the British army and intelligence services. It noted that whilst the espionage and counter-espionage services of the British Admiralty kept watch on boats suspected of covertly embarking Jews for Palestine, the Intelligence Service pursued clandestine networks.⁶⁰

The contents of this short report to the Ministry of the Interior is particularly significant because it coincided with a period in which the Ministry found itself under severe attack from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This was because of its alleged failure to verify the visas of ultimate destination of Jewish immigrants leaving from French ports. The Ministry's response that visas for such unlikely destinations as Columbia, Cuba or Venezuela had been thoroughly checked and were found to be in order must be set against the actual knowledge in its possession, clear from the RG report, that these same immigrants were actually leaving French or Italian ports for

⁵⁶ Archives Nationales, RG reports 27.12.46 and 30.12.46.

⁵⁷ CZA, Blumel Files, A426/49. Letters from Weizmann to Marc Jarblum, 13th and 17th January and reply from Jarblum on 20th January, 1947.

⁵⁸ Archives Nationales, RG report, 29.1.47.

⁵⁹ For a geographical appreciation of the sea routes to Palestine see map in Appendix 2 showing many of the ports used for illegal immigration.

Palestine. Clearly this exposes a deliberate exercise of bad faith between government ministers. (For a full analysis of inter-ministerial conflicts engendered by illegal immigration see Chapter 5.3)

In the spring of 1947, the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Paris considered how to respond as the British began to show signs of relinquishing the Mandate. The coming Assembly of the United Nations, which was to discuss the issue, concentrated the minds of the Zionist leadership within the Political Department into how they could mobilise their friends in the French administration, other political parties and public opinion in general, into supporting their cause. The former political head of the Haganah, Dr. Moshe Sneh, in addressing his colleagues, emphasised the need to create a real dialogue between it and the French administration to ensure that its position at the next session of the UN was in line with those of the Agency. The necessity now was to move from the occasional visits and friendly conversations with Ministers to reach out to the permanent civil servants who dealt with policy on the Middle East. The objective was to influence these officials in the Agency's favour in the weeks preceding the Assembly's meeting in September 1947. Sneh was under no illusion as to the obstacles that had to be surmounted. He had recognised that, for a variety of reasons, mainly economic, France was presently obliged to adopt a political line close to that of the British and the Americans. In addition, because of its interests in the Middle East and North Africa, France could not adopt a position which would alienate the Moslem world. Sneh proposed two devices to counter these tendencies. One was to feed the French paranoia that both the British and Americans were conspiring against her interests in the Middle East and North Africa. The second was to convince the French that by supporting the Zionists she could better face the Arab threat.

Acknowledging that calls for sympathy for the Jewish plight were no longer effective, Sneh suggested that instead one had to offer something in return by recognising the needs of one's partners. For instance, the Jews could render services to the French in Lebanon, whilst in North Africa, a more difficult terrain, at least information could be supplied. The whole point was to counter the influence of the Americans, the British and the Muslims by proving the value of the Yishuv as a partner.

⁶⁰RG report, 25.1.47.

The Jewish Agency's desire for influence with political parties was targeted mainly at the Communists. The arguments to be deployed here were that (a) the Yishuv was the only progressive community in the Middle East and that the existence of such a community could influence the progress of adjacent communities [such as the Arabs] and (b) that the Yishuv aspired to have total independence in a democratic framework and that it would, in consequence, be an anti-imperialist force. Sneh also had a message for the Catholic Church, namely that the presence of Judaism in the Middle East was the only obstacle to a Moslem monopoly and would safeguard the Christian presence both in Palestine and in adjacent countries.⁶¹

Undoubtedly, this meeting of the most eminent local Zionist representatives underlined the importance Sneh attached to creating, at all levels of influence in France, an atmosphere sympathetic to the establishment of a Jewish State.

As has been noted, the work being carried out by the officials of the Jewish Agency and the use of Paris by Ben Gurion as his diplomatic home during his virtual exile from Palestine, was at all times subjected to the watchful eye of agents of Renseignements Généraux. Such surveillance was also extended to other Palestinian emissaries, such as those from the Haganah, the Irgun or the Stern Group, who were engaged in more covert operations. They were either treated benignly by the authorities, as in the case of illegal immigration, or were pursued by the regular police when gun-running was involved. Whichever role they chose to play, they all initially found in France an environment conducive to the pursuit of their activities.

3.2 Mossad/Haganah, Irgun Zvai Leumi and Stern Group

Mossad/Haganah

Shaul Meirov's first post-war visit to Europe was to Italy where he inspected some of the DP and Training Camps. With his subsequent move to Paris in mid-May 1946 the decision to establish there the European headquarters of the Mossad was in sight of fruition. Paris was a return journey for Meirov as he had already resided there before the war at the Hôtel Métropole.⁶² Initially, Ehud Avriel assisted Meirov and then in June 1946 he was joined by Venya Pomerantz, another experienced member

⁶¹ CZA, Immigration Dept., S6/1657, Minutes of Meeting of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Paris on 30th May 1947. Present Sneh, Jarblum, Blumel, Fischer, Goldberg and Jefroykin.

of the Labour-Zionist Kibbutz movement, which was extensively involved in illegal immigration activities. In the spring of 1947, on Avriel's return to Palestine, Pomerantz succeeded him.⁶³ Pomerantz, in later life, adopted the Hebrew name of Ze'ev Hadari and it is under this name that he wrote a series of books about the Mossad's activities.⁶⁴

Meirov instilled in the emissaries who reported to him the necessity to observe a modest lifestyle and absolute probity when dealing with the substantial sums placed in their care for operational activities. This would include the purchase of ships, equipment and "greasing payments" (bribes) for shipping agents, customs officials and military and police officers in various parts of Europe. On returning from a mission, the Mossad emissaries would first report to Meirov on its results. Because of the need for secrecy, no receipts were expected but a full accounting of the money entrusted to them had to be given, which was then accepted without query. Very little money was spent on administrative expenses or to cover the living costs of the emissaries.⁶⁵

They also received strict instructions to avoid being conspicuous, not to compromise civil servants or complicate the political and diplomatic moves of the French Government.⁶⁶ From his headquarters in Paris, Meirov supervised the Mossad leadership in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany and Italy. He also liaised with Pino Ginzburg in Geneva who controlled the Mossad's finances.⁶⁷

In Hadari's memoirs, Meirov is described in the following terms: "An austere person who lacked charm and humour, his appearance was unimpressive and his conversation was not brilliant. However his dedication, diligence and total identification with the work of illegal immigration gave him undisputed prestige and authority..."⁶⁸

This impression of Meirov was echoed by Arie 'Lova' Eliav who, at the age of 25, commanded the ship the *Ulva* when it was intercepted by the British in February 1947. Before that, for a short time, he worked in the Mossad's office in Paris. His own

⁶² Arie Boaz, *Olam Vnochet Becol: Hayech Shaul Avigur (Unseen yet always Present: The life story of Shaul Avigur)* (Tel Aviv, 2001), 194. Shaul Meirov changed his name to Avigur (Father of Gur), after the death of his son in the War of Independence in 1948. Hereafter Boaz.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁶⁴ Interview with Philippe Boukara, Paris 6.10.04. According to Boukara a "pomerantz" in Yiddish can be translated as an orange, whereas Hadari in Hebrew refers to a grove such as an orange grove.

⁶⁵ Boaz, 208.

⁶⁶ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, (Paris, 1969), 91 and Hadari, *Hamossad L'Aliyah Bet* (Beer Sheva, Israel, 1991), 16.

⁶⁷ Joseph Kennet, *L'Angleterre, la France et l'Immigration Clandestine en Palestine, 1945-1948*. Master's Dissertation (Mémoire de Maîtrise), Annexe B.7 (Paris, 1985).

recollection of Meirov was of an aesthetic but charismatic man with the natural authority of a commander-in-chief, whom one obeyed without question. He lived in a small room in the Hôtel Métropole, Avenue Victor Hugo, with his wife like “a monk and a nun in a cell.” To his “soldiers”, for that is how they regarded themselves, he would show his regard for them by ritually inviting them to drink a cup of tea with him. For him, this was “having a good time.”⁶⁹

Idith Zertal paints a different picture of the man. For her he was lacking in boldness, imagination and decision-making ability. “A man who did not inspire followers, who was hidden from view of those he commanded.” She contends that Meirov’s uncontested leadership derived from a personal history of militant Zionism and his work in the Mossad before the war. This was also aided by his network of contacts within the political leadership and marriage ties (he was married to Moshe Shertok’s sister). However, Zertal effectively undermines her criticism by revealing Meirov’s philosophy as to the nature of his role, effectively one of management by delegation. She quotes him as saying

In full awareness, I chose not to intervene in the details of activity of our people on site... I was careful to give them all the feeling of space for their initiatives, imagination and ability to implement. I understood that for this grand enterprise spread across almost the entire face of Europe and the seas, it would be a practical impossibility to manage from one centre, one headquarters, and that the ‘modest’ job of headquarters was to assist, encourage, stimulate and come up with appropriate resources and people in the field. I would coordinate and intervene in operating details only when there was an absolute need to do so.⁷⁰

Meirov conducted operations from his room on the third floor of the Hotel Métropole, a small, nondescript two star hotel near the Arc de Triomphe, used by passing businessmen. Often whilst he was engaged with one or other visitor on Mossad business, his wife, Sarah, would cook their frugal meals on an electric stove before returning to her equally modestly-furnished room. Meirov’s main working tools were his desk and particularly his telephone which kept him in continuous touch with New York, Geneva, Milan, Prague and other locations. Passing international calls to

⁶⁸ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 22/23.

⁶⁹ Telephone Interview with Arie ‘Lova’ Eliav, 25.11.03.

⁷⁰ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 178/179.

“Monsieur Meirov” was a regular task for the hotel’s telephone operator. He also received daily deliveries of messages transmitted to the secret radio stations of the Haganah in the Paris area. From time to time he made short journeys in Europe to discuss matters with his operatives on the spot. Other than that, Meirov did not leave the hotel often, except to visit the Mossad office, one of the radio stations or conduct meetings held in small cafes or during walks along the Champs Elysées. Of course when Ben Gurion or Moshe Shertok came to the more high class Royal Monceau, he would visit them there. In April 1947 the Meirovs returned for a holiday to their home on Kibbutz Kinneret to meet up with their sixteen year old son, Gur. After a month Meirov returned to Paris alone.⁷¹

Like many of the institutions of the Yishuv, the Mossad was a quasi-autonomous organisation which did not automatically accept the authority of the Jewish Agency. This had its advantages and disadvantages. It allowed the Agency to disclaim, somewhat disingenuously, responsibility for illegal immigration over which it had, ostensibly, no direct control. However it also granted the Mossad a level of autonomy, which ran counter to Ben Gurion’s attempts at centralisation of the decision-making process. Hadari contends that Shaul Meirov, together with Ehud Avriel, himself and, later in 1947, Yehuda Breginski, constituted the quartet which made the major decisions on the Mossad’s activities in Europe and elsewhere. They dealt with the appointment of emissaries to the Mossad’s various branches, the choice of ports of departure, the acquisition of equipment and the covert transit routes to be used by the immigrants. No written records of their meetings were kept. Mutual trust was the watchword.⁷²

Although Meirov was never positively identified by the British Intelligence services as the head of the Mossad, he as well as Pomerantz, Kluger, Shaltiel and thirty-six other named individuals were identified in a letter from Sir Alan Cunningham, the High Commissioner in Palestine as being involved in illegal immigration activities. He particularly requested that the Italian authorities refuse to grant any of them visas to Italy.⁷³ It is highly doubtful that there was a positive response to this request as Palestinian emissaries appeared to have no difficulty in moving from country to country, as their work demanded.

⁷¹ Boaz, 205.

⁷² Hadari, *HaMossad*, 11.

By the end of 1946 and in order to centralise the Agency's various secret activities, Meirov had taken under his wing four existing autonomous units. The "Bricha" organisation which directed displaced Jews to the camps in Austria and Germany;⁷⁴ "Haganah-Europe" which ensured transit to the ports of embarkation; "Ha'Apalah" (under the control of Palyam escorts) which covered the sea journey to Palestine; and "Rekhes" which dealt with arms procurement. The heads of these activities did not formally report to Meirov but nevertheless respected the authority which Ben Gurion had endowed him with.⁷⁵

In respect of Rekhes, there are many accounts of arms being stolen from the British army by the Jewish Brigade whilst it was in Italy and of other arms being purchased from former French Resistance members. Their storage in depots in France, unlike illegal immigration, was not looked on benignly by the French authorities and often police raids and confiscation took place.⁷⁶

The daily routine work of the Mossad in Paris was carried out from an office at 5 rue Chabanaïs which was the Paris branch of a Palestinian-based travel agency.

The street was frequented by prostitutes and their clients and this provided cover for the daily comings and goings of local Mossad operatives.⁷⁷ The office was run as a communications centre. From here coded telephone messages were received from and sent to other operatives. Only the minimum paper work relative to the centre's use as a travel agency was retained, in case of inspection by the authorities.⁷⁸

Although Hadari insists that few written records were ever kept in Paris, the existence of the Paris log of radio transmissions with ships at sea, Palestine and other Mossad centres in Europe does indicate the existence of at least one documentary

⁷³ TNA, CO 537/1803, letter from High Commissioner for Palestine to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3.9.46. This was his response to a warning from the British Embassy in Rome on 21.8.46 that persons suspected of illegal immigration activities were attempting to enter Italy for this purpose.

⁷⁴ "Bricha" (Flight) was the name of the organisation originally set up by former Jewish partisans in Poland to facilitate the movement of Jews to the American and British DP Camps, as a first step towards Palestine. Later, under Mossad control, centres funded by the Joint in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia acted as transit points for refugees from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. This work was carried out with the full knowledge of the governments in situ and indeed with their approval. For further details see Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 189.

⁷⁵ Boaz, 195.

⁷⁶ Karen Akoka, *L'Aliyah Bet et la France 1945-1948*, Master's Dissertation (Maîtrise d'Histoire), (Paris, 1994), 1-153. Whilst arms procurement for eventual despatch to Palestine was an important activity within the Mossad, it did not become crucial until November 1947 and the advent of Arab armed intervention in Palestine following the Partition vote in the UN. (See Chapter 8).

⁷⁷ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 142.

⁷⁸ Hadari, *HaMossad*, 10.

record of the Mossad's daily activities.⁷⁹ The log was introduced by Hadari and covered the period January to September 1947. It is a series of partially coded messages dealing with ships, ship refurbishment and equipment, numbers of immigrants, fuel supplies and financial matters. Some of the most extensive radio traffic between Paris and Marseilles concerned the last-minute difficulties over the departure of the Exodus in July 1947.⁸⁰

In order to escape the vigilance of British intelligence, renowned for their skills at wire-tapping and interception of radio transmissions, specific codes were allocated to individuals, ships, countries and financial matters.⁸¹ After an initial brush with the French authorities over the use of illegal transmissions (See Chapter 5.2), the Mossad was allowed by the DST to maintain its communication network in France as long as it was prepared to decipher, on request, selected transmissions.⁸²

According to Hadari, it was the newly-appointed (June 1946) Socialist Minister of the Interior, Edouard Depreux, who laid down the rules for covert contacts with the Mossad. The main conduit was to be the head of the DST, Roger Wybot and his deputy Stanislas Mangin.⁸³ Hadari contends that the relationship with the French administration was based solely on mutual respect and not on any written agreement. He contended that without the aid afforded by large numbers of French officials it would have been impossible to bring thousands of DPs to France and set up transit camps for them prior to their departure from ports near Marseilles.⁸⁴

Having obtained the complicity of the Minister of the Interior, and the cover he afforded, the Mossad was able to concentrate on securing the five prerequisites for its work, namely:

- Ships flying flags of convenience;
- Supplies of ships' diesel fuel;
- Suitable ports of embarkation;
- Transport facilities and assembly points close to the ports; and
- An efficient communications network.⁸⁵

At the end of 1946, it was Hadari who first recruited a former member of the Jewish resistance, Georges Loinger, to the Mossad in Paris. Loinger, who was a Jew,

⁷⁹ The operations log book was given by Avraham Polonski to Idith Zertal prior his death in 1990.

⁸⁰ Hadari, Hamossad, 108/114.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸³ Hadari, Second Exodus, 144.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

had already established his reputation as a clandestine operator whilst smuggling Jewish children over the Swiss border in the latter part of 1942. He was recommended to the Mossad by Joseph Fischer as an accomplished man capable of dealing with the French bureaucracy at all levels. His appearance and demeanour were very much that of a native Frenchman, his family having long been established in Alsace Lorraine.

After a forty minute interview conducted by Hadari in Meirov's presence at the Hotel Metropole, Loinger's future role was carefully spelled out to him. The Mossad were planning what they termed a spectacular event which would have worldwide repercussions on public opinion and progress the establishment of a Jewish State. The plan was to run a ship with no less than 4,000 DPs through the British blockade and land them on the coast of Palestine. Such a large number would easily dwarf all the more modest attempts made so far and required far-reaching organisation.

Loinger's task would be to establish himself in Marseilles and make contact with senior police officials and customs officers in order to allay their suspicions about the widespread activity which would soon be very visible in the ports in the area. He was to explain that the people who would be boarding a ship some months ahead would be Jewish DPs brought from camps in Germany and who were only transiting through France with the blessing of the Ministry of the Interior. Given that the local authorities were already alert to the wide spread smuggling of cigarettes from Italy, it was essential that they did not mistakenly judge the Mossad's activities on the coast as being against French interests. Basically, Loinger's job was to wine and dine local officials and gain their confidence.

Through Hadari, Loinger was introduced to Edouard Depreux, the Minister of the Interior and then to his subordinates Marcel Pagès and his assistant François-Xavier Rousseau. These two civil servants were responsible for the control of aliens in France and, among other things, for the issue of transit visas. To ensure that Loinger was free of any official interference in carrying out his tasks he was provided with a letter signed by Marcel Pagès, indicating that he was accredited to the Ministry of the Interior.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, 79.

⁸⁶ Interview with Georges Loinger in Paris, 10.11.02.

If nothing else, this account serves to underline the close and friendly relationships which the Mossad were able to establish at the heart of the French Ministry of the Interior. This aspect will be further explored in a later chapter.

Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Group

As compared to the activities of the Mossad in illegal immigration, those of their political opponents, the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organisation), were minimal. Nevertheless they had played an important part before the war. In February 1939, heavily involved in illegal immigration, the heads of the movement had met in Paris and decided that they would, together with the New Zionist Organisation (Jabotinski's political party) and Betar, its youth organisation, expand their activities. As a result, the Irgun brought some 10,000 illegal immigrants from Romania and Poland to Palestine.⁸⁷ However, after nine months' activity, war broke out and all activity was suspended. In war-torn Eastern Europe the network was not entirely destroyed. Some members went underground whilst others joined the partisans, organising sabotage and the welcoming of parachuted agents.

In Palestine, the Irgun provided the British with reconnaissance and sabotage teams to be used against the Vichy authorities in Syria, Lebanon and North Africa. In addition, the Irgun served British Intelligence in unmasking Axis agents in the region.⁸⁸ As a mark of gratitude the British released from prison in Palestine David Raziel, the head of the Irgun. He was later killed in Iraq during a special mission on behalf of the British.⁸⁹ In the post-war period, the Irgun, did not attempt to compete with the Mossad, but cooperated with both it and the Bricha.

It is suggested by an Irgun sympathiser that they ceased their illegal immigration operations after 1945 because their sole strategic goal then was armed revolt in Palestine.⁹⁰ Thus, in Paris, the Irgun concentrated all its efforts on propaganda and illegal arms procurement. Only once in 1947 and again in 1948, did it organise the despatch of immigrant ships to Palestine.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Dalia Ofer, "Illegal Immigration during the Second World War: Its Suspension and Subsequent Resumption". *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, No. 7 (Jerusalem, 1991), 220/246.

⁸⁸ TNA, KV/3/41, Notes on Jewish activities for Director General of MI5, 1.11.46.

⁸⁹ Kennet, 149/161.

⁹⁰ Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, *Archives of the Holocaust: Hecht Archives Haifa* (New York, 1990), xxii Notes by Paul Rose.

⁹¹ Kennet, 188.

Its representative in France, Schmuel Ariel, soon established a good rapport with Marcel Pagès of the Aliens Department. Soon after Ehud Avriel's arrival in Paris, Ariel was instrumental in introducing him to Pagès.⁹² At their meeting, Pagès indicated that he was prepared to make available thousands of transit visas to help Holocaust survivors find a new life in countries outside Europe. This was later formalised in an agreement signed by the Ministry of the Interior with the Conseil Interoeuvres de l'Aide aux Emigrants et Transitaires Juifs (See Chapter 5.3). These first acts of cooperation between representatives of the Irgun and the Haganah do not appear to have endured and were most likely affected by changing attitudes in Palestine itself, where antagonism between the two para-military organisations was developing.

To ensure that the Irgun did not use military operations against British institutions in France, Ariel was constrained to provide verbal reassurances to that effect to Pagès. This commitment was again repeated some eighteen months later in May 1948, but this time in writing, when Princess Elizabeth and her husband were due to visit Paris.⁹³ Of particular concern to the Foreign Office was the presence in France at the time of two Palestinian militants, Lipa Zabrowski of the Irgun and Yitzhak Yesternitski, of the Stern Group. Together with three others they had escaped from British internment in Eritrea and had sought refuge in Djibouti. They were eventually brought to France, thanks to the sympathetic attitude of Edouard Depreux and other Government Ministers.⁹⁴

This grant of asylum was made despite the grave concerns that had been expressed on a number of occasions by the British Embassy in Paris at the delay in repatriating "these dangerous terrorists" back to detention in Eritrea.⁹⁵ The French police calmed British fears about the safety of the royal couple's visit to Paris by temporarily removing the two gentlemen to the south of the country on the 12th of May. In passing this information to the Foreign Office, the Paris Embassy commented

⁹² Avriel, 266.

⁹³ Jabotinski Institute Archives, 2/2 315, Personal Papers of Schmuel Ariel.

⁹⁴ Document supplied by Shlomo Nakdimon. Copy of letter from E. Depreux to Prime Minister, indicating that he considered the two escapees as political refugees and that they should be accorded short-term visas for France, 24.11.47.

⁹⁵ MAE Archives, Immigration, file 376, Letter from British embassy to MAE, 24.6.47.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs were of course quite willing to help but as usual found themselves up against a blank wall in the case of the Ministry of the Interior. The Minister of the Interior, Monsieur Moch, is himself a Jew and as we progressed it became fairly clear from hints dropped to us by the police that these two Jews enjoy very high protection in political circles. We do not know exactly who is concerned but Monsieur Moch and possibly Monsieur Blum seem obvious guesses.⁹⁶

Yesternitski, under his new name of Yitzhak Shamir, was destined to become, at a much later stage, Prime Minister of Israel. The prime mover in obtaining for Shamir and his companion, now renamed Arye Ben Eliezer, political asylum in France in May 1948 was Claire Vaydat, who had close connections in the higher reaches of the French Government. As a result of her perseverance both in Paris and Djibouti, they were released from custody and transported from East Africa on a French warship. They eventually arrived in Paris on 1st May 1948 to be greeted at the railway station by Claire Vaydat, Schmuël Ariel and French government officials.

The direct involvement of French government officials in the protection of these two men is highlighted in an anecdote of Jean Morin, one of Bidault's officials many years later. It appears that in June 1948, Scotland Yard were putting pressure on Pierre Boursicot, the head of the Sûreté to locate Yesternitski. Boursicot aware of Morin's close contacts with Schmuël Ariel, asked him to pass him a message that he would like Yesternitzki to pay him a courtesy visit. Morin claims that he then warned Ariel that his "dangerous terrorist" friend was at risk. However, "since the request came from a British source" he lied to Boursicot that he was unable to contact Ariel. In the meantime Ariel spirited Yesternitski away from his home where he had been in hiding and eventually managed to get him to Palestine.⁹⁷

Claire Vaydat, a Hungarian by birth, had come at a young age to study in France. She later became known to Georges Bidault for her work in the Résistance when he was chairman of the Comité National de la Résistance (CNR). She also had close contacts with Bidault's wife, Suzanne, through their work together in Vaydat's refugee-aid Agency, the 'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Déportés'. It was through these privileged contacts that she first managed to introduce Schmuël Ariel to Marcel Pagès

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 371/ 68631, Paris Embassy to Foreign Office, 12.5.48.

⁹⁷ Jean Morin, "Menahig, Adam, Yedidi-Nefesh" in *Yalkut Ariel: Ha'Ish Shel Altalena* (Tel Aviv, 1994), 68-75. This is Morin's contribution to an anthology on Schmuël Ariel by those who knew him.

at the Aliens Office and later to the MAE.⁹⁸ Later events were to suggest that, like many others, she fell under the charismatic influence of Schmuel Ariel and became more inclined to the Irgun's philosophy. (See Chapter 8 on arms shipments to the Irgun). Nevertheless, according to Vaydat, in helping the Zionist cause, she made no distinction between the Haganah and the Irgun. The humanitarian aspect was her major concern.⁹⁹

Unlike the Haganah, whose watchword was discretion, the Irgun and the Stern Group repeatedly managed to hit the headlines in the French press. On 9th July 1947 the French police discovered two large Irgun arms dumps in Paris and in the suburb of Nanterre. Sixteen Jews and French accomplices were arrested including the apparent leader, Maurice Zizac, a Jew of Polish extraction. He disclosed that 60 cases of munitions and explosives were to have been shipped soon to Palestine via Marseilles.¹⁰⁰ In an exhibition of bravado he also proclaimed to the police "You have not yet won. You have discovered two arms depots, but we have others and other operatives".¹⁰¹ According to MI5 only two of the Irgun men were convicted and were sentenced to only a few month's imprisonment with light fines.¹⁰²

Later in September 1947, an American Rabbi, Baruch Korff, of the American Political Action Committee for Palestine, a Stern Group front-organisation, was arrested at Toussus-Le-Noble airport outside Paris together with a pilot by the name of Reginald Gilbert. They were about to take off in a small plane to drop propaganda leaflets over London. This was to be followed later by another flight whereby fire extinguishers converted into aerial bombs were to be dropped on the Houses of Parliament.¹⁰³ Whether this project had any chance of success appears doubtful. Nevertheless it was Gilbert, an RAF pilot during the war, who had alerted the French police.¹⁰⁴ Within days he was flown out, for his own safety, on an RAF plane to London. There he was interviewed on the BBC and related his version of the story.

As to the colourful Rabbi Korff, he had previously attracted the attention of the press in the USA by his announcement that he was about to parachute illegal immigrants into Palestine from American and Canadian war-surplus planes acquired

⁹⁸ Yediot Ahronot. Article on Claire Vaydat's visit to Israel by Schlomo Nakdimon, 11.8.80.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 9.7.47.

¹⁰¹ Le Populaire, 10.7.47.

¹⁰² TNA, KV 3/41. Lecture on Zionist activities given by an MI5 operative to police officers, 16.3.48.

¹⁰³ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 7.9.47.

for the purpose. The Stern Group later published a communiqué denying any links with Rabbi Korff. In all ten persons were arrested, of whom two at least were strongly suspected of being members of the Stern Group. One of these was a certain Jacques Martinski, who had already come to the attention of MI5 when he landed in the UK on 6th March 1947 the day before an explosion took place in the Colonial Office. All the persons arrested in the Korff incident were released on indefinite bail.¹⁰⁵ Not surprisingly, Maître Blumel had been their defence counsel.¹⁰⁶ Blumel was often called to represent members of the Stern Group or the Irgun, when they found themselves in trouble with the law.

These dramatic stories appealed to the local press, as any story about the Irgun's or the Stern Group's activities whether in Palestine or France tended to be good copy. They were given as much prominence as stories of armed robberies, the trials of war-time collaborators and the ongoing problems of French coalition governments. The Haganah, being far more discreet, did not rate much copy until the story of the Exodus preoccupied the press between July and September 1947. To the credit of the Mossad, its name never appeared in print and neither did the identity of its team of operatives working quietly in Paris and Marseilles.

The strident publicity-seeking actions of the Irgun and the Stern Group were commented on with a certain amount of sarcasm by a leader writer in Le Monde, a quality French daily. Under the heading of "How Jewish Misery is exploited", the writer, Edouard Sablier, exposed the venal nature of the many adventurers who were attracted by the finances available to the sponsors in the USA of these two extremist organisations. Offers to supply submarines and torpedo boats to sink British navy ships were some of the more extravagant offerings.

Sablier mentions particularly the American League for a Free Palestine (associated with the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation) which, under the motto "Give us the money and we shall finish the job" attracted large contributions from American Jews and non-Jews alike. The writer points out that there was little to show for the money, in terms of bringing Jews to Palestine, and that in practice it was the Haganah who were "doing the job" rather than the extremist organisations. In effect, he accused these sponsors of establishing themselves comfortably in Paris, where, for

¹⁰⁴ Le Monde, 10.9.47.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, KV 3/41 Lecture, 16.3.48.

two years they had been free to address their propaganda efforts to all the local newspapers. He comments, finally, that if they had been attracted by the tourist attractions in France and were happy to spend their easily-acquired dollars, then that was all to the good, as long as they didn't give the police too many headaches.¹⁰⁷

A typical example of the type of posturing referred to by Edouard Sablier was that of one of the leaders of the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation (HCNL), Peter Bergson, whose real name was Hillel Kook. In December 1946 he held a press conference in the USA before leaving for France. His self-proclaimed purpose was to head a special office in Paris, "which is preparing the establishment of a Government in Exile of the Hebrew Republic of Palestine."¹⁰⁸ This project was at first supported "wholeheartedly" by the Irgun's leader, Menachem Begin.¹⁰⁹ Later he disavowed it as being too premature.¹¹⁰ Given that the HCNL had no power base and therefore no political legitimacy in Palestine proper, compared to that of the Jewish Agency, such a conclusion was inevitable.

Compared to the almost theatrical antics of the Irgun and the Stern Group in France, one can surmise that the quiet professionalism and low profile of the Mossad must have commended itself to the Ministry of the Interior.

3.3 Training and Transit camps

France provided the essential secure environment in which the Haganah could at the same time promote illegal immigration and train youngsters of military age for eventual action in Palestine. Using centres made available to them through the auspices of the local Zionist organisations and supported financially by the Joint, the Haganah opened transit centres for refugees, but also other centres, of a more covert type, in which they ran a number of training courses. These ranged from general military training to more technically-oriented courses, such as those for ships' escorts, engineers and seamen.

It was Polonski who set about organising camps in secluded areas in France for recruits to Aliyah Gimmel, where suitable youngsters, under the guise of

¹⁰⁶ Archives Nationales F7/15292, RG report, 29.4.47.

¹⁰⁷ Le Monde, 12.9.47.

¹⁰⁸ Haganah Archives file 123. Statement at Press Conference, 26.12.46.

¹⁰⁹ New York Herald Tribune, (European Edition) March 1947 Interview of Menachem Begin by Lorna Lindsley in a 'secluded spot' in Jerusalem, March 1947.

¹¹⁰ Yitzhak Ben Ami, Years of Wrath, Days of Glory: Memoirs from the Irgun (New York, 1983), 470.

physical education instruction, would be given military training. This involved field work, navigation, familiarity with personal weaponry and self-defence. They were also taught to identify the uniforms of British policemen and soldiers in case they had to oppose them in Palestine.

Polonski also set up a naval school in Marseilles to train the Palyam (Naval arm of the Palmach) naval officers who would navigate illegal ships to Palestine. Late in 1947 a civil aviation pilots' school was opened near Paris to train crews for a future air-cargo fleet, which would enable the speedy delivery of arms to Palestine.¹¹¹ In both instances former officers of the French armed forces were recruited to provide the necessary professional training. It is more than likely that the French Defence Ministry, which contained a number of pro-Zionist officers, turned a blind eye to these clandestine activities on French soil.

At St. Jérôme, one of the transit camps, former members of the AJ forgery team exercised their skills in preparing false documents for immigrants travelling to Palestine on regular steamships, which would escape the attention of the British authorities in Haifa.¹¹² This was known as Aliyah Dalet, yet another form of clandestine immigration which complemented Aliyah Bet and Aliyah Gimmel. Youngsters were either recruited from the Zionist youth movements or amongst former members of the war-time Jewish Resistance, the AJ. After initial training they went through a ceremony where they swore allegiance to the Haganah. They were then allotted specific missions in France pending their eventual departure for Palestine. The recollections of two of these recruits graphically illustrate the clandestine nature of the work of the Haganah in France in the immediate post-war era.

One of these recruits was Israel Avidor from the town of Roanne (near Lyon). Born in Poland in 1926 and brought to France in the early 30s, Avidor was part of a family with strong Zionist tendencies. In 1940, after the French debacle, the family temporarily left Roanne when it was occupied by the Germans. They moved back after the Germans retreated over the newly established demarcation line, leaving a Free Zone in the south. In November 1942, after the allied landings in North Africa, the Germans invaded the Free Zone. Soon afterwards, Avidor, now 16, began a clandestine existence within the EIF and was involved in the safeguarding of Jewish children. Later, whilst he

¹¹¹ Ben David, 263; Grynberg, 19.

¹¹² Grynberg, 19.

remained hidden in a Catholic agricultural college, for his own safety, his own parents were deported.

The war left him completely disorientated and in search of a new focus. A meeting with Ruth Kluger of the Jewish Agency, at a local Zionist meeting, soon after the end of the war, was to change the course of his life. Together with a childhood friend, Jacques Golan they were sent for para-military training to a secluded site near Paris. After three weeks they participated in a ceremony where they swore allegiance to the Haganah. As Palyam recruits, their role was to be trained as radio operators for the boats even then being prepared for illegal immigration. They participated in Morse code courses at a Hachsharah (training farm) at La Madrague, near Marseilles. This led to proficiency in the use of both the Hebrew and the English alphabet.

In June 1945 Avidor was told to report to David Shaltiel at the offices of the Jewish Agency in the Avenue de la Grande Armée, for his first mission. To his great disgust they lodged him overnight in a hotel used as a brothel. The following day Shaltiel instructed him to go to Toulouse and pick up radio transmission equipment from Jacques Roitman, one of the leaders of the AJ. His orders were to set up a clandestine radio station in a villa called the Clos Marie in Bandol, near Marseilles. Once established at the villa with his friend Jacques and a young DP called Lottie, they established radio contact with the Mossad in Palestine. A secret code based on the words "Nof Ya' Aròt Yirushalayim" ("view of the forests of Jerusalem") was utilised for all messages. The first message received in October 1945 was news of a raid by the Palmach to liberate illegal immigrants interned by the British in Atlit. This and all other messages were decoded and deposited at the Panamanian Consulate in Marseilles on a daily basis. There they were picked up by 'Rudi' Zameret, the local Mossad chief. In turn "Rudi" would leave messages to be transmitted to Palestine.

For cigarettes and other needs, Avidor and his companions were allowed to draw on American army supplies in a store-room at Les Eygalates. The storeroom also contained large quantities of blankets, army uniforms and K-rations destined for the immigrant boats. There were also weapons, including machine guns, still in their original grease protection. Their stay at the Clos Marie was swiftly brought to an end due to a security mishap. A lorry loaded with grenades destined for the Haganah overturned near Marseilles and provoked the interest of the local Gendarmerie. Fearing discovery of the radio station as a result of the police investigation, Rudi ordered Avidor

to close it down, bury their radio equipment and personal weapons and move to the transit camp at St. Jérôme in Marseilles, whilst waiting for passage to Palestine.

Avidor's new mission was to work with a pioneering group from the English Zionist youth movement, Habonim. The group of 20 young Zionists were to be trained to carry out, in a thoroughly organised and disciplined manner, the embarkation of some hundreds of DPs onto a schooner which was being prepared for the journey to Palestine. Every day they were woken up in the early hours by the sound of an alarm siren, which was to be the signal for the embarkation. They were then timed as they rushed to assemble in the courtyard with their rucksacks. Eventually, on 29th July 1946 the actual operation was put into effect. Streams of British Army lorries, "borrowed" by the Jewish Brigade brought 754 DPs from St. Jérôme and other transit points to the little fishing harbour of La Ciotat. They were mainly young men and women, survivors of the Holocaust, determined to reach the shores of Palestine. There was also a group of Hungarian Hasidim led by a Rabbi called Leiditch. Restricted to only one piece of luggage, because of the lack of space in a hold crammed full of tiered bunks, much had to be left behind.

Avidor was introduced to an American Jewish army chaplain, called Major Hazelkorn. His batman, Cy Caller, was a Haganah man from Kfar Giladi who had joined the American army. As there was no possibility of cooking on board, Caller organised large quantities of American K-rations to be supplied. Powerful radio equipment had been installed on board for Avidor to maintain contact with both France and Palestine, but this proved to be inoperable due to an insufficiency in the voltage supplied by the generators on board. They therefore sailed without any possibility of radio contact whatsoever. The ship, with a Turkish crew and sporting a Turkish flag, was named the Sagolem. There were also two former Spanish Republican sailors on board, who had come for the experience and because they hated the British. The ship was overcrowded, unsanitary and plainly unseaworthy. Nevertheless, at 2 pm on 29th July it set sail, without any interference from the French authorities.

Off the coast of Crete the ship was saved from crashing into the rocks by the two Spanish sailors who took over when the Turkish crew got drunk. In another incident on board, Avidor had to arrest at gun point a number of ex-partisans who were intent on supplementing their prescribed ration directly from the water tanks. Their leader, Vladik, threatened Avidor that once in Palestine, he would be the first to be hanged.

As they approached Palestinian territorial waters they were spotted by an RAF plane and soon they were caught up with by HMS Ajax of "River Plate" fame. At that point they changed the name of the boat to the Yagur and raised the Israeli flag. When British sailors boarded the ship on 11th August a brief battle ensued to remove the flag, but it was finally allowed to remain.

Sighting Haifa after 14 days at sea in appalling conditions, unwashed and hungry, the spirits of the immigrants were raised by the sight of the lights on Mount Carmel and the assumption that soon they would finally land in Eretz Israel (the Zionist name for Palestine). That night they were left on board guarded by Arab members of the Palestine police. The Jewish Agency was allowed to bring food aboard. But in some of the loads of bread were messages addressed to the leadership and sticks of dynamite. The messages announced that the British intended to force them onto other boats which would then sail for Cyprus. Their instructions were to disable the boats, before departure, using the dynamite. However because of the unknown risks involved no such action took place.

The following morning, under instructions to resist their removal, the DPs lay down in the hold and refused to budge. The soldiers used force and were attacked with tins of corned beef and other K-rations which had been the staple diet on board. Eventually, after being sprayed with DDT, all were removed to a prison ship, the Empire Rival. Their possessions were left behind. On 13th August the ship set sail for Cyprus which it reached a few hours later. There were 448 men and 306 women on board.

In Cyprus the internment camps were still in course of preparation, but barbed wire and watchtowers were already in place. Tents had to be put up, and the DPs then segregated themselves into groups according to their political or religious persuasions. Thus the twenty English immigrants stayed together, sharing the same tents. As an example of survivor resourcefulness in the face of hardship, DPs, over the next days, suddenly appeared in new blue clothes which turned out to be the inner linings of the tents. Cypriot tailors had brought in sewing machines to do the job.

Haganah officers, who had slipped into the camps, began para-military training out of sight of the sentries. Also when journalists appeared to photograph and interview the internees, lavish demonstrations were organised to emphasise their desire to be allowed into Palestine. The camp commandant, a Major Mitchell, allowed a great deal

of autonomy in the camps in order to avoid disturbances. Nevertheless attempts were made to create chaos and embarrass the British in the eyes of the world. After a few months had passed Jewish Agency representatives arrived with Palestine entry certificates, which gradually enabled the first arrivals to leave the camps, at the same time as newly captured illegal immigrants were arriving. Avidor and his future wife Rachel, from the English group found themselves in Palestine in December 1946 and initially settled at Kfar Blum. In 1948 they moved to Kfar Hanassi where they remain to this day.

When, in 2002, it was put to Avidor that given a limit of 1500 Entry Certificates a month, the real effect of illegal immigration was to deprive legal immigrants of their rightful place in the queue, he responded that this was not a consideration. The desire of the DPs to leave the camps in Europe at any cost, was matched by the Jewish Agency's political need to create the largest measure of embarrassment and difficulty for the British in the eyes of the world. There was a two-fold objective. Firstly to force the British to allow the creation of a Jewish State and secondly to increase the Jewish population in preparation for the anticipated war with the Arabs. In Avidor's view, illegal immigration, despite its very limited success in terms of actual numbers landed, fulfilled these aims. In his words "The show paid off!"¹¹³

The American Jewish chaplain mentioned by Avidor, Rabbi Abraham Hazelkorn, was very much involved with the Mossad in the acquisition of arms. With the help of a few American Jewish soldiers stationed in Marseilles in 1946, he amassed a large stock of weapons and ammunition, some purchased from former French Communist resistance fighters. Together with his assistant Cy Caller, he was also instrumental in setting up an illegal radio station in Toulon. This enabled the Mossad to have a radio link with Tel Aviv. Any messages received were brought to Hazelkorn's office and read over the American army's telephone lines to the Mossad's office in Paris and vice versa. Unfortunately, after seven weeks, an army telephone operator overheard a conversation in Hebrew and warned Hazelkorn that only English was permitted on military telephones.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Interviews with Israel Avidor and some of the English group at kibbutz Kfar Hanassi, Israel on 25th September 2002.

¹¹⁴ Alex Grobman, Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry 1944-1948 (Detroit, 1993), 118.

With regard to Avidor's ship, the Sagolem, whilst it was Cy Caller who provided the food from American storehouses, it was Hazelkorn who obtained visas from a local South American consul to enable the immigrants to leave France. In return the consul received treatment for an ailment from an American army doctor. Hazelkorn continued to work for the Mossad until he left France at the end of 1946.¹¹⁵

The second testimony from a Haganah recruit concerns the specific task of training a group of instructors for the so-called 'Aliyah Gimmel' project. Avraham Polonski, the legendary chief of the AJ, prevailed on his former comrades-in-arms to provide the necessary infrastructure. One of his recruits was Jean Brauman, born in Lodz (Poland) in January 1925. After two years of clandestine activity in the Jewish resistance, under the name of Jean Denou, he moved easily into the new role assigned to him by Polonski, that of military training instructor. The purpose was to train a team of instructors who would themselves run similar courses for the hundreds of youngsters which the Haganah intended recruiting from the Jewish communities in France and North Africa.

To assist Brauman the Haganah despatched from Palestine, in late 1945, an emissary called Hanan Jacobi. The first training camp was at Milles La Forêt, just south of Paris. It comprised a secluded country house in a large expanse of ground, eminently suitable for military-type training. Although weapons were available to teach their use and maintenance, ammunition could not be used for fear of drawing the unwanted attention of the local police. The course lasted three weeks, at the end of which the thirty participants swore allegiance to the Haganah. Brauman recalls that for the occasion David Shaltiel attended the ceremony.

Brauman described Polonski, the resistance leader around whom a legend had sprung, as a small, nondescript man but one who exuded a natural authority. As in war time, the volunteers of the AJ did not question the purpose of a task allotted to them by "Monsieur Pol", as he was known. Thus when Brauman was asked to move south to the Pau region, to extend the training programme, he accepted without demur. He later came under the orders of another Palestinian emissary, Emmanuel Nishri, the second-in-command of the Haganah in France. Nishri was a gymnastics expert who concentrated on bringing the instructors themselves to the highest level of physical fitness. Once their

¹¹⁵ Grobman, 119.

early morning training was over they, in turn, put the new student instructors through their paces.

During the summer months, Brauman would visit the camps of Zionist youth movements, such as Dror and Habonim in order to find suitable recruits to be trained as instructors. The intention was to provide all Jewish communities in France and its North African possessions with trained personnel who could create self-defence units to be used in case of antisemitic incidents. Brauman's own desire to go to Israel in June 1948 was frustrated because instead, he was sent on an inspection tour to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to check out the state of self-defence preparedness of the communities. There he met up again with his former students, many of whom had only known him as Monsieur Jean.

When interviewed, Brauman stated his conviction that the French police and Gendarmerie were well aware of the nature of the training camps but, out of a feeling of sympathy, took no action. He was equally convinced that the opportunity to undermine the British presence in the Middle East and to take revenge for past perceived humiliations, fuelled their sympathy for the Zionist cause. Brauman cited the case of a friend, called Bernard Kwort, who had managed to get to England and join the Free French forces of General Leclerc. After the war Kwort joined the DST. Years later, now a captain in the Israel Defence Forces, he would relate how Roger Wybot, the Director of the DST, would often ask him to quietly resolve complications which his "fellow Jews" had created on French territory. Often this involved gun-running.

Brauman himself was sometimes asked by Polonski to accompany a lorry load of arms, to ensure that the driver did not get too curious about the contents. Once delivery was made to the camp at Le Grand Arénas, some 7 kilometers from Marseille, his task was over. Given the strict conditions of segregation of responsibilities under which they operated, he never inquired into the origin nor the final destination of the arms. A colleague of his called Fernand was actually arrested by the Gendarmes during the course of such an arms transport. Later, thanks to the intervention of André Blumel, he was quietly released.

From time to time, Brauman was exceptionally posted to Le Grand Arénas itself. The camp had previously been under military control. One part of it was still occupied by German prisoners of war, whilst another part was occupied by people from

Indochina awaiting their return home. Yet a third part was a Jewish refugee camp, or more correctly a transit point for those awaiting an illegal transport to Palestine. When a boat became available the German POWs were used to move the luggage of the immigrants onto the lorries which would take them to their port of departure. The task of Brauman and his men was to marshal the hundreds of people involved and ensure that their identities matched the selection that had previously been made. Often they had to remove refugees who had hoped to jump the queue by hiding among the luggage.

In June 1947, Brauman was posted to the Chateau of Sanderval, near Marseilles, to take command, with his men, of four groups of 200 refugees each, temporarily lodged in tents, who were destined to embark on the President Warfield, later renamed the Exodus. Their wait lasted some two or three weeks before Brauman, at a special farewell ceremony, handed them over to the commander of the boat. That night dozens of lorries from a variety of transit camps brought some 4,500 immigrants to the Port of Sète.

Brauman felt that the emphasis on military training, for which he was made responsible, was very much a Palestinian as opposed to a French Jewish reaction to the Holocaust. This reflected a conscious desire to ensure that Jewish communities now had a means of defence, wherever they might be situated. In addition, with the hope of bringing all Jews to Palestine, the Haganah viewed the military training as a means to bind French Jewish youngsters to the Zionist enterprise. He also emphasised that the members of the AJ provided the Haganah with an infrastructure for Aliyah Bet, which, given their lack of knowledge of France or its people, they could not have created by themselves. He insisted that, without a network of people used to working in a cohesive, clandestine manner and with the technical skills learnt in the resistance, the vast enterprise of Aliyah Bet in France would not have succeeded.¹¹⁶

That premises controlled by Jewish organisations were used for the storage of weapons amassed by Rekhesh is confirmed by at least one mishap. On June 3rd 1946 the French police discovered in the Château de Cambe in the Lot and Garonne department 666 cases containing 35 tons of British small arms and ammunition. The chateau was used by ORT as an agricultural training centre for prospective immigrants to Palestine. The suspicion of the police had been aroused by the arrival, in broad

¹¹⁶ Interview with Jean Brauman in Paris on 9th July 2003. He died suddenly in November 2003 and Georges Loinger gave the eulogy at the graveside.

daylight, of a convoy of military lorries whose drivers wore British battledress. The British Military Police were asked to inspect the find and identified one of the cases as being originally consigned to the Palestine Regiment. It was noted that a number of soldiers from this unit had been in Paris recently, in transit from Holland to Toulon awaiting repatriation to the Middle East.¹¹⁷

The camps in the south of France were an essential half-way point in assembling and preparing the immigrants for the hardships of their clandestine voyage to Palestine. The internal staffing at these transit camps was provided by a motley crew made up of members of the Zionist youth movements and ex-members of the Jewish Brigades, who were also awaiting their turn to join one of the illegal boats. One of the duties of former members of the AJ was to ensure the supply of food to the transit camps in the Marseilles area.¹¹⁸ At the camps the prospective immigrants were introduced to their Palestinian escorts, mainly members of Palyam, who instructed them as to the necessity for discipline and obedience to orders. They were then provided with new identification papers specially designed to convince the police at the port of departure of their bona fides.

Officially the camps were under the control of the FSJF. Its operational headquarters, under the directorship of Frédéric Thau was at 24 rue des Convalescents in Marseilles. Its main food and clothing depot however was at the Villa Les Tilleuls at St.Jérôme, which was also a transit camp. From here some 14 other centres, which could lodge some 4,000 to 5,000 refugees, were supplied with their needs.¹¹⁹

A report from the RG in October 1946 expressed some signs of impatience with Thau because of his reluctance to deal with police inquiries and to submit to the controls that they wanted to impose. On instructions from the Ministry of the Interior Thau was reminded that in no case could the time limit on transit visas be exceeded. The report also threw doubt on the validity of the ultimate destination visas, which had proved to be false in the past. Finally the writer pointed out the dangers inherent in

¹¹⁷ TNA, CO 537/1790 Report by British Embassy Paris, 2.7.46; Franc-Tireur, 16.6.46.

¹¹⁸ Nicault, 217.

¹¹⁹ Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône (Hereafter BDR) 148W185, Letter from FSJF to Préfecture du BDR, 9.11.49.

uncontrolled immigration.¹²⁰ In a further report the RG stated categorically that the FSJF, under the cover of a welfare organisation was engaged in illegal immigration.¹²¹

A revealing insight into the extent of police eaves-dropping, even within the offices of the FSJF, is provided by a report of an “ intercepted” conversation between Thau and the President of the National Movement Against Racism, in Marseilles on 19th November 1946. Closeted together, these two apparently discussed Jewish immigration to Palestine, the procurement of boats for the purpose and new solutions to move Jews from DP Camps against British wishes.¹²² From other reports of the RG it is clear that the police authorities were under no illusions as to the real activities of the FSJF in the Marseilles area. Nevertheless at no time, despite representations by the British Embassy, was there a concerted move to close the various centres that it controlled. From this one can surmise that the Ministry of the Interior disregarded the frequent RG reports on suspected illegal immigration and was content to allow the FSJF great latitude in its activities.

The vote on partition in the UN Assembly on 29th November 1947 was the signal for the Haganah in Europe to move on to a war footing. In France this became known as the “Grande Mobilisation”. Funds for the Haganah were collected and Polonski’s Matsav organisation began recruiting hundreds of youngsters and putting them through Aliyah Gimmel training courses. To assist in this particular task, Yehuda Ben David, a member of the Haganah, was transferred from Germany in March 1948 and became Polonski’s second in command.

Eleven military training camps were discreetly established and 250 recruits trained during each short course. In the two months after the creation of the State of Israel, some 2,500 to 3,000 recruits were despatched to Israel. Many had been brought over from North Africa. During this same period, civilians with specialised skills such as medical and nursing qualifications were sent over by plane. So were the trainees from the naval school. The pilot school, together with its two planes, was retained in France in case of an emergency in North Africa, when arms might be required at short notice to defend the Jewish community.¹²³ The French authorities quietly made space

¹²⁰ Archives Départementales des BDR 148W185, Memo from Commissaire Principal, Service Départemental des RG to Préfet of BDR, 26.10.46.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, RG report, 6.11.46.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Report from Service Départemental des RG Marseille, 20.11.46.

¹²³ Ben David, 271.

available in the military camps of Le Grand Arénas and St. Thomas near Marseilles, for the Haganah to carry out military training.¹²⁴

A major concern of the police authorities was to avoid the danger of violent clashes between the local Arabs and the Zionist organisations in the Marseilles area, who were openly training volunteers for service in the new Israeli army. According to a police report, one of these centres, which was also under the surveillance of Arab elements, was the Villa Clos-Joli on the Boulevard Peypin in Marseilles. Every night military exercises took place in the open. From 5th of June convoys of empty lorries of American manufacture arrived and were loaded, probably with arms and ammunition.¹²⁵ Whilst the existence and location of transit and training camps was known to the local Arab population, they did not attempt to interfere with their operation, certain in their belief that the nascent Jewish State would be crushed at birth by the invading Arab armies. However, when this failed to materialise and a truce was arranged by the United Nations, a wave of militancy spread through Marseilles's Arab population, spurred on by the belief that outside interference - in this instance, the French Government- was helping the Zionists with political and material support.¹²⁶

Despite the alarm bells being rung by the Renseignements Généraux, the warnings of sabotage to boats and attempts to stop Jewish immigration and the destruction of Jewish training and transit centres by the Arabs of Marseilles do not appear to have materialised. Marseilles became increasingly the favourite port of embarkation for immigrants to the new State of Israel.

Polonski's organisation in France continued to operate until it suddenly received instructions from Ben Gurion at the end of 1950 to cut off all contact with Israeli institutions. Only operations in North Africa were to continue. In a subsequent enquiry held in Israel, held at Polonski's request, he was cleared of a charge of having exceeded his authority.¹²⁷ According to Georges Loinger there appeared to have been some question of the misuse of Haganah funds.¹²⁸

The range of overt and covert activities in France illustrated in this chapter bears testimony to the wide network of support available in France for the Zionist endeavour. Throughout this period, the outstanding contribution to its success had

¹²⁴ Archives Nationales, F7/15589 Direction des Renseignements Généraux. : Centre Officiel de Transit.

¹²⁵ Archives Départementales des BDR, RG report, 9.6.48.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ben David, 74.

been the relative absence of arbitrary police actions which were such a feature of life in France in the unsettled social atmosphere of the immediate post-war era. This phenomenon attests to the complicity in Aliyah Bet of many Government officials who took their cue from the benign attitude towards Zionist activity of those Cabinet Ministers responsible for internal affairs in France .

¹²⁸ Interview with Georges Loinger, 10.11.02.

CHAPTER 4 Other Entities concerned with illegal immigration

Although not among the major players in the whole saga of illegal immigration, there were two institutions which, respectively, by their covert actions, tried to assist or hinder the campaign. On the one hand there was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ("the Joint") which, at least officially, was concerned purely with welfare activities and yet unofficially was one of the financial backers of illegal immigration.¹ On the other hand there was the British Intelligence Service, known variously as either MI6 or the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), which was tasked by the British Government to prevent potential illegal immigrants to Palestine from embarking at ports on the Mediterranean or the Adriatic coasts. Although the latter soon discovered that the Joint, despite its quasi official status (it liaised closely with the American State Department and UNRRA) was involved in Bricha activities, it was unable to mount any effective counter action along the transit routes. In the absence of positive proof and despite its certitude that a large-scale movement of Jews out of Eastern Europe would severely test its policy of restricted immigration into Palestine, the Foreign Office was averse to using diplomatic pressure on the Americans to restrain the Joint. Even in Italy, where the British had a military presence, they did not take action against Joint personnel, whom they suspected of covert activities.² In a vain attempt to stem the flow of Jews out of Poland and later through the Black Sea ports, the Foreign Office launched a series of *démarches* to the new pro-Communist governments of Eastern Europe to have their borders closed to this Joint-assisted movement.³

Referring now more specifically to Aliyah Bet, where it is clear that the Joint provided a measure of direct financial assistance to the Mossad, it is useful to assess whether this was indeed crucial to the whole enterprise or whether its significance has

¹ The Joint's creation in 1914 by American Jewish philanthropists had as its original aim to bring welfare assistance to the Jews of Palestine then facing a famine. It had no political line or ideology. It was simply there to provide financial assistance on a temporary basis when a particular crisis developed. In the course of its existence its original restricted brief was to undergo radical changes as the needs of Jews worldwide had to be increasingly addressed.

² Arie Kochavi, "British Response to the Involvement of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Illegal Immigration to Palestine", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol.8 (London, March, 1989), 231.

³ *Manchester Guardian*, 19.8.46. An account of British diplomatic pressure on the Czech Government to close their frontier with Poland to Jewish refugees.

been overrated. Equally, the activities of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), directed now to concentrate its surveillance efforts on the Mediterranean ports of departure, are also worthy of scrutiny to assess how far the British Government was prepared to use both illicit and diplomatic means to stop the departure of the illegal ships.

4.1 The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (The Joint)

The actual presence of the Joint in France can be dated to the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany in 1933. Its approach was always to work through the existing communal welfare organisations, underpinning their social, medical, educational and cultural programmes. To that extent it acted purely as a financial resource. It relied principally for its funds on an annual contribution from the United Jewish Appeal in the USA.⁴ The Joint's view of its unique mission, devoid of any political dimension, was encapsulated in the following statement by its Chairman, Edward Warburg, of the American banking family: "In all of its history, JDC in its work of relief and rehabilitation of Jewish victims of war and persecution has scrupulously refrained from political activities, and has never deviated from its principle of exclusive adherence to its humanitarian role."⁵

During the Second World War the Joint continued to operate in France, despite America's invasion of French North Africa, which had led to a breakdown in diplomatic relations with the Vichy Government. It continued to find ways to maintain its financial support to a Jewish population under persecution and in danger of deportation. Large sums of money were provided to Jewish organisations, such as OSE (medical /welfare) and the EIF (Jewish Scouting movement), for the safeguarding of children and, where necessary, their removal over the Swiss frontier. One of the clandestine representatives of the Joint in France was Jules (Dyka) Jefroykin, former president of the FSJF and now a leader of the MJS and the AJ. Another was Marc Jarblum, until he was forced in 1942 to take refuge in Switzerland to avoid arrest by the Gestapo.

After the war, a large part of the work of the Joint's staff was devoted to the welfare of the inmates of the DP Camps set up by the British and the Americans.

⁴ Isabelle Goldsztein, "Le rôle de l'American Joint dans la Reconstruction de la Communauté" *Archives Juives* No. 28/1, 1er semestre (Paris, 1995), 25.

⁵ Moses. A. Leavitt, *The JDC Story: Highlights of JDC activities* (New York, 1953), 4.

Initially, however, the Joint's role was often criticised by DPs who believed that they had arrived late on the scene and paid insufficient attention to the level and quality of the aid they were providing.⁶ A few months later however Dr. Joseph Schwartz, the European Director of the Joint, was able to report that there was almost universal appreciation of the Joint's work in Germany's DP camps. "No longer do we hear the kind of criticism that was prevalent in the early days."⁷ The Joint organised mass supplementary feeding programmes, built extensive health services and created educational and recreational facilities. Starting with some 100,000 DPs at the end of the war, by 1947 this had increased to some 250,000, mainly as a result of the exodus from Poland.⁸

In France as well, the Joint recommenced its official activities and was immediately involved in large-scale financial assistance to the Jewish community, a large part of which was destitute. However it is its relationship with the Mossad which provides an interesting area of study.

In practice, as archival documentation has revealed, political activity, specifically support for illegal immigration, was not neglected, although it did cause a great deal of heart-searching among the members of the Joint's Board. The essential concern of the Joint was that it depended for its funds on a philanthropic organisation, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), which itself was apolitical and espoused strict adherence to American official policies. In the seven years following the end of the war, the Joint's share of the UJA's income was no less than \$350 million, or an average of some \$50 million for each year, a vast sum by today's standards.⁹

The leadership of the Joint were initially opposed to the encouragement that representatives of the Yishuv were giving to Eastern European Jews to leave their countries of origin for DP camps and, subsequently, Palestine. This contentious issue was finally resolved at a meeting of the United Jewish Appeal in December 1945, when representatives of the Joint reconciled themselves to the idea that this was the principal means of resolving the DP problem.¹⁰

⁶ Frederick D. Bogin and Sybil Milton, eds., *Archives of the Holocaust: American Joint Distribution Committee Vol.10 Part 2* (New York, 1995). Report on Bergen Belsen by Shlome Michael Gerber, Director-JDC activities in Paris, 28.6.46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Letter to Moses A. Leavitt from Joseph Schwartz, 9.11.46.

⁸ Leavitt, 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ Kochavi, "British Response", 223.

In early 1946 the Joint found itself drawn into the activities of the Mossad. According to Hadari, a decision was taken at the headquarters in Paris to move from small to larger ships capable of carrying thousands of immigrants. To finance these it was intended to procure funds from the Joint and from institutions in the Yishuv. The possibility of raising loans from individuals in the USA was also discussed.¹¹ The Joint was already supplying food and clothing for the transit camps run by the Mossad in Southern France and a close rapport had been developed between Shaul Meirov and Dr. Joseph Schwartz in Paris. Now the Joint was to be approached with a request for direct aid to illegal immigration, a somewhat more delicate matter.¹²

Tad Szulc, a journalist on the New York Times, argues strongly that Meirov and Schwartz came to an informal agreement in April 1946. This envisaged that, in addition to the legal cover provided by the Joint for Bricha activities in Eastern Europe and the necessary finance already put in place, it would, in a more covert manner, finance illegal immigration activities. That Schwartz, a fervent Zionist, was consequently acting outside the stated remit of the organisation was made abundantly clear to him by the Joint's Board back in New York. For the most part its members were not Zionists and would not tolerate what they considered illegal activities. On 10th May, after consulting the local Joint Director in France, Laura Margolis (the wife of Marc Jarblum), Schwartz cabled his resignation to Moses Leavitt, the Joint's treasurer. In view of the potential harm to the Joint's reputation which such a public display of dissention would cause, the key members of the Board relented. On 12th May the Chairman of the Board, Edward Warburg, sent a cable to Schwartz rejecting his resignation "Forget it Of course we back you... I love you anyway."¹³

Other than pointing to Warburg as the narrator of these events, no supportive documentation was cited by Szulc to corroborate this story. However what is not in dispute is that Schwartz did at some stage commit the Joint to a subsidy of 40 Palestinian Pounds (\$160) for each of 6,600 illegal immigrants the Mossad intended to bring to Palestine in the first half of 1946.¹⁴ The Haganah's own statement to the press

¹¹ Hadari, Second Exodus, 142.

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³ Tad Szulc, The Secret Alliance: The Extraordinary Story of the Rescue of the Jews Since World War II, (London, 1991), 120.

¹⁴ Kochavi, "British Response", 224.

in June 1947 confirmed that \$160 was the cost of transporting one immigrant across the Mediterranean. A further \$40 was required to move a refugee overland from Germany to the port of embarkation.¹⁵

Although Szulc contends that Schwarz's judgement was never again questioned by the Board, this is not borne out in the Joint's own documentation. Indeed there were ongoing debates back in New York to find rational justifications for financing illegal immigration. A number of the Joint's members in New York were very wary of the Joint's involvement. The ultimate effect was that a stop-go situation emerged depending on which Board members were winning the argument at the time.¹⁶

In July 1946, Joseph Schwartz was approached in Paris by Eliezer Kaplan, the treasurer of the Jewish Agency, for funds to assist the illegal immigration of 13,500 immigrants from a number of ports over the next two months. On the basis that only 10,000 could realistically be dealt with, Kaplan asked for a contribution towards the cost of the project of \$120 per head, or \$1.2 million in total. This, he indicated, was a reduction of \$40 per head, which had been advanced on a previous occasion. [This refers to the first subsidy in respect of 6,600 immigrants]. Schwartz's response was to limit the Joint's contribution to \$1 million. Crucially, Schwartz obtained Kaplan's agreement that, should the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry's report finally succeed in forcing the British to grant 100,000 Entry Certificates to Palestine, illegal immigration would cease forthwith.¹⁷

In this instance the Joint had adopted the rationale that, as these immigrants were only temporarily interned and then released in Palestine against the monthly quota, they could not be strictly characterised as illegal, whatever the British viewpoint. However, when the British authorities began interning illegal immigrants in Cyprus in August 1946 without deducting them from the monthly quota, attitudes changed. The Joint felt that to continue to subsidise immigration under these new circumstances would clearly be illegal and would put their status at risk with the UJA and the US Government. As a result, subsidies ceased in October 1946.¹⁸ The Mossad had no choice

¹⁵ TNA, CAB 104/277, Answer to parliamentary question, 19.11.47.

¹⁶ Kochavi, "British Response", 223-234.

¹⁷ AJJDC Archives, New York Collection 45/54, file 626, Memorandum of conversation between Joseph Schwartz and Eliezer Kaplan in Paris on 20.7.46.

¹⁸ AJJDC Archives, Minutes of discussion at Administrative Meeting re: Palestine Immigration, 11.3.47.

but to source other funds to cover the cost of some 6,000 immigrants before Joint subsidies were again resumed in the spring of 1947.

At a meeting in New York on 11th March 1947, Schwartz managed, against stiff opposition, to convince the Board to make available a further \$1 million for illegal immigration. Underlying this decision was the fact that the British had begun to allocate part of the monthly quota to the Cyprus detainees in December 1946, thus "legalising" their status.¹⁹ This offer was the subject of a meeting between representatives of the Joint and representatives of the Mossad two months later in New York. Initially the discussion revolved around the payment of \$820,000 for the 8,200 immigrants who had arrived in Cyprus in April and May 1947. Although partial payment had been made by Saly Mayer, the Joint's representative in Switzerland, the Mossad's treasurer, Pino Ginsburg was anxious to receive the balance promptly. He was assured it would be paid in New York. At this point both Pino Ginsburg and Ze'ev Shind, the Mossad's representative in the USA, advised the Joint of the difficult financial situation the Mossad was facing and its need for ready cash. They explained that they already had some boats and agreements signed for more boats to enable the transport of an additional 40,000 persons. All moneys received from the Joint and the Jewish Agency had already been invested and more cash was needed.

Ginsburg and Shind then disclosed the Mossad's current plans. The first was to bring Jews out of Germany to Italy and that 2,500 had already been moved despite the lack of help from the American authorities. The second plan was to move 10,000 immigrants from Germany to France, and they already had 1,500 transit visas towards this end. Ginsburg was aware that the British authorities were pressurising the French to stop issuing transit visas, but that the French refused to discriminate between Jews and non-Jews. A third plan being considered was moving DPs from Germany to Romania, where the Romanian Government had agreed to the exit of 50,000 Jews. Ginsburg felt that the situation for Jews in Romania was so bad that they had a priority case. However this was not accepted by the Joint representatives. They made it clear that an additional \$1 million which the Mossad representatives were now looking for, if granted at all, would only be

¹⁹ AJJDC Archives, Minutes of discussion at Administrative Meeting re: Palestine Immigration, 11.3.47.

available to move 10,000 DPs out of Germany.²⁰ After a later discussion, Ginsburg and Shind's request for an additional \$1 million was approved but not until the State Department itself had been informally approached by Warburg and had indicated its own approval.²¹

As the documents have disclosed, a total sum amounting to \$4,056,000 was made available by the Joint to the Mossad in four instalments during 1946 and 1947 to cover the illegal immigration of 36,600 Jews who were in DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. In comparison to the total of some 69,600 who attempted to reach Palestine by this means, the Joint's subsidies, although significant, could not be assessed as the crucial element in illegal immigration. This was because, as clearly illustrated above, the Joint's funding was not open ended.

Idith Zertal, in her book, comments at length on the Joint's subsidies to illegal immigration. However as against the figures shown above, she contends that the Joint subsidised the illegal immigration project in its entirety at a cost of \$7,440,000. Her figures are, however, arrived at by simple extrapolation and she readily admits that the financial records of the Mossad, which might have resolved the issue, had not been found.²² Nevertheless she contends that the Mossad could never have functioned without the enormous assistance of the Joint.²³ However, since her figures appear to be somewhat unreliable so must be her contention. Similarly, the figures obtained by Arie Kochavi in an interview with Joseph Schwartz in 1962 also appear to be excessive and are not supported by the documentation. Schwartz estimated that the Joint had contributed \$10-\$12 million to Bricha activities and a maximum of \$18 million to illegal immigration.²⁴

It must be assumed that the Jewish Agency itself was able to call on various other resources to fund the Mossad's activities. No doubt part of these resources were funds received by Pino Ginsburg in Geneva and this corresponds with the assertion that Ben Gurion maintained "a special fund in Switzerland", through which the Mossad drew its operating costs.²⁵

²⁰ AJJDC Archives, Memorandum of meeting with "Mr. Szind and Mr. Pino". Present for AJ JDC: Louis H. Sobel, Boris. M. Joffe and Dorothy L. Speiser, 23.5.47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, File 626, Israel-Bricha. Memorandum from Evelyn M. Morrissey to Louis H. Sobel, 12.6.47.

²² Zertal *Catastrophe*, Note No.128 to Chapter 6 of her book.

²³ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁴ Kochavi "British Response", 225.

²⁵ Ben David, 26.

On the same topic, Arie Eliav referred to the vast sums in dollars kept in Paris, which on one occasion he was ordered to spirit away to a safer location, in view of an expected police raid.²⁶ Hadari contributes to the debate on sources of finance by stating that, according to Meirov, the Jewish Agency only ever contributed some 25% of the costs, whilst private donations from wealthy individuals enabled the purchase in the USA of large ships, including the President Warfield and two Canadian corvettes. In other instances loans were procured which were guaranteed by the local Jewish community. Perhaps even more interesting is Hadari's assertion that large debts were incurred, and were then inherited by the new State of Israel in May 1948.²⁷

Whatever the true origins of the funds used by the Mossad for ship acquisition and refurbishment, Yehuda Bauer's suggestion that illegal immigration was handicapped by shortages of ships and money is unlikely to have been the major factor.²⁸ Rather the sheer logistical problem of moving thousands of DPs out of the occupied zones of Germany and Austria and across France or Italy to ports of departure was a more logical limiting factor. As an example, the embarkation of some 15,000 Romanian immigrants in a Bulgarian port in December 1947, indicates that where logistical problems could be overcome and British diplomatic pressures ignored, in this case thanks to the ready assistance of the Romanian and Bulgarian authorities, the availability of finance and ships was not an issue.²⁹

The Joint, because of its concern at all times to maintain its status as a legal organisation concerned with humanitarian issues, deliberately avoided direct involvement in the actual organising of illegal immigration. Quite clearly, however, its personnel, on an individual basis, often took actions involving the movement of refugees, which were construed by British intelligence as effectively aiding the process. How then did this organisation in particular respond both to the Joint and the other organisations involved in this traffic ?

²⁶ Telephone Interview with Arie 'Lova' Eliav, 25.11.03

²⁷ Hadari, HaMossad, 29.

²⁸ Bauer, Flight, 66.

4.2 British Intelligence

In order to provide the Cabinet with the most up-to-date information on the activities of those concerned with illegal immigration, MI5 (Military Intelligence) coordinated the reports of SIS agents in the field.³⁰ They could thus disseminate extensive data on the use being made of the DP camps as a jumping-off point for illegal immigration and of the use of welfare organisations such as the Joint as a cover for clandestine activities.

In a first report dated August 1946 covering some 13 pages, MI5 covered such topics as 'Routes through Europe, Organisation in Maritime Countries and Final Shipment to Palestine and the implication of UNRRA and other relief organisations'. Throughout the report the complicity of the Joint, Bricha, the Jewish Brigade and Haganah members working under the umbrella of UNRRA were fully exposed and analysed. Whilst admitting that, as yet, little was known of the illegal immigration organisation in France, it suggested that the head of the Paris office, Ruth Kluger, facilitated the journeys of prominent Zionists and members of the Jewish Agency from Palestine and the UK to the continent and that it was suspected that the primary reason for these visits had been in connection with illegal immigration. In its conclusions the MI5 report stated "Members of the Jewish Agency and other Zionists have succeeded in building up an organisation which leaves hardly a country in Europe untouched... The machinery thus brought into being must be admitted to have achieved a considerable measure of success in neutralising British Immigration policy in Palestine."³¹

In September and October 1946 an MI5 liaison officer toured France, Germany, Austria and Italy to carry out a general survey connected with arms-running and illegal immigration activities in Western Europe by "Jewish terrorists." His second task was to determine the intelligence coverage available to combat these activities. In his discussions with British intelligence agencies abroad, he emphasised the need to feed back information on these matters to London and also to satisfy Foreign Office requirements in the matter of producing concrete evidence of the complicity of named persons, officials or

²⁹ Reference here is to the Mossad ships, the Pan Crescent and the Pan York which were intercepted by the Royal Navy on 31st December 1947 and escorted to Cyprus. For complete details see Ze'ev Hadari, Voyage to Freedom.

³⁰ TNA, KV 3/41, Notes on Jewish activities for MI5's Director General, 8.11.46.

³¹ TNA, FO 371/56239, Appendix C, "Jewish Illegal Immigration from Europe to Palestine", 8.8.46.

institutions, especially Americans, UNRRA and the Joint which might enable diplomatic action to be taken vis-à-vis the ultimately responsible authorities. In addition, his report emphasised the importance of supplying the Palestine Government, police and security authorities, through MI5, with all possible intelligence on Jewish activities in Europe.

In a section of his report headed "Appreciation", the liaison officer gave his views on what French security coverage existed and how much of it might be used by MI6 (SIS) to advantage. With regard to the "Service de Documentaton Extérieure et Contre-Espionnage (SDECE)", he noted that, although their counter-espionage brief only extended outside France, they had also provided information collected inside France. Nevertheless, owing to known contacts between a "noted Zionist in Paris with an unidentified member of the SDECE", there was too much of a security risk for MI5 to work with this security agency. His views on the DST were even more disparaging and he characterised the agency as un-cooperative. As to the Sûreté Nationale, political considerations precluded any high degree of cooperation. The only security agencies which he termed as cooperative were the Renseignements Généraux (which carried out surveillance on potentially subversive elements) and the Seine Police Prefecture. The latter, on request, had promptly made available their dossier on Dr. Mosheh Sneh, the former political head of the Haganah, now exiled in Paris. The liaison officer concluded that the assistance of the French Government and the security authorities could only be obtained on an ad hoc basis and after pressure had been exerted.³²

In a twenty-eight page report in February 1947, MI5 disclosed that the main camps which served as staging posts for illegal immigration were Hohne (Belsen) and, in the American zone, Landsberg. The logistics involved in moving refugees from Poland and via the camps was undertaken by an organisation using the pseudonym "Unser Weg" (Our way).³³ Furthermore, it noted that US army transport was often used to ferry DPs to Brussels via Frankfurt and Strasbourg. In Brussels, which was the collecting point for DPs on their way to Marseilles, they were furnished with false identification papers.³⁴

Faced with their failure to convince the French authorities to take appropriate action to stem the flow of illegal immigrants, the British Cabinet, through its Defence

³² TNA, KV 3/56 Report on tour of MI5 Liaison Officer between 5.9.46 and 8.10.46.

³³ Most likely refers to the Bricha.

Committee on illegal immigration to Palestine, set about preparing its own plan to secure “improved control of embarkation of illegal immigrants from French ports and also from Italian ports”. The subject was discussed at an inter-departmental meeting on 18th March 1947.³⁵ Given that representatives of both MI5 (Military Intelligence) and MI6 (SIS) were convened to that meeting, there can be little doubt that the intention was to increase covert surveillance operations on French soil. The objective was to pre-warn the Palestine authorities of suspect sailings and also to inform the British Consulate in Marseille, so that diplomatic action could be taken.

A further report by MI5 to British representatives in Europe reveals that intelligence work was very thorough, with substantial information about ships, activities in the camps, routes across Europe, ports of departure, sailing dates and numbers of illegal immigrants.³⁶ The problem for British Intelligence, once a boat had been labelled as “suspect“, was to follow her movements from one Mediterranean port to another, as she was fitted out or re-fuelled, in order to determine in which port illegal embarkation was likely to take place. After that it was the role of British diplomacy to intervene.

There are a number of examples of the extent of British intelligence surveillance operations. For instance its reports on the Ulua, firstly in Sweden (Trelleborg) and then in France (Le Havre) generated feverish British diplomatic activity in a vain attempt to have her impounded before she attempted to sail to Palestine.³⁷ In the case of the President Warfield (later renamed the Exodus) surveillance had already started whilst she was still in the USA. According to intelligence reports, she initially attempted to pick up illegal immigrants in La Spezia but was prevented from doing so because of “the helpful attitude of the Italian authorities”.³⁸ It is then perhaps purely by chance that she eventually sailed from France rather than Italy, from where she had been expelled as a result of British diplomatic intervention. Again, the appearance of the Pan Crescent in Marseilles in October 1947, led to British representations to the French government to

³⁴ TNA, FO 371/61802, 26.2.47 “Jewish Illegal Immigration into Palestine, Summary No.9, for period 16.10.46 to 17.2.47”.

³⁵ TNA, FO 371/61804, 9.4.47.

³⁶ TNA, FO 371/57693. There were frequent reports to the Foreign Office from Box No.500, Parliament Street, B.O, which was the address of the Director General of the Security Service to whom MI5 reported.

³⁷ TNA, FO 371/61801, Letters from MI5, to Foreign Office, 31.1.47 and 6.2.47.

³⁸ TNA, FO 188/595A, Telegramme from Secretary of State at Foreign Office to Paris Embassy, 20.7.47.

deny her fuel and prevent any embarkation.³⁹ The final example of SIS surveillance is that of the famous Irgun ship the Altalena (See Chapter 8) and two other suspect ships which were spotted in Genoa in January 1948. The British Embassy implored the Italian Foreign Ministry to detain the ships until after the end of the Mandate, some four months away.⁴⁰

There were many “suspect” ships but not all turned out to be involved in illegal immigration. Nevertheless they were all systematically placed under surveillance, a considerable effort for the British agents involved in the task. It is likely that the choice of port of departure was only determined by the Mossad at the last moment, in order to avoid the possibility of interference by the French or Italian authorities under diplomatic pressure from the British.

British Intelligence activity on French soil had already been noted by the Mossad in early 1946. A radio transmission from Paris to the Mossad in Palestine by “Shimon” one of the code names of L’Abbé Alexandre Glasberg, noted that the Ministry of the Interior had been informed by the British of the departure of a suspect immigrant boat from a French port. They demanded an investigation into the matter, as well as a report on Zionist activities in France.⁴¹ Glasberg completed his message with the information that he was in touch with the “French security agency” dealing with the matter.⁴² Glasberg, through his presidency of the Conseil Interoeuvres de l’Aide aux Immigrants et Transitaires Juifs, had close contacts with the Ministry of the Interior’s agencies, not least of which was the DST which kept him informed of all activities by the SIS which could interfere with the Mossad’s work.⁴³

Central to the surveillance operations in the Marseilles area was the British Consulate, to which all intelligence information was conveyed. The reports were then conveyed to the Foreign Office and copied to the Embassy in Paris. But whereas in the spring of 1947 this operation had sufficient resources and manpower, such was not the case in 1946. Then forced to rely on one covert source known only as ‘P’ (undoubtedly a

³⁹ TNA, CO 537/2380, Telegramme from Foreign Office to Paris Embassy. It was feared that because of their size, both the Pan Crescent and the Pan York might prove to be “unboardable” and therefore would succeed in beaching themselves on the Palestine coast.

⁴⁰ TNA, CAB 104/279, Aide Memoire from British Embassy, Rome to Italian Foreign Ministry, 14.1.48.

⁴¹ Gershon (Col.) and A. Rivlin, The Stranger Cannot Understand: Code Names in the Jewish Underground in Palestine (Tel Aviv, 1988), 430.

⁴² Haganah Archives, Aliyah Bet files. Series 114, Jan/April 1946. Shimon to Artzi, 5.2.46 at 1400 hours.

French official), the Consul-General pleaded with the Foreign Office for the despatch to the area of a 'Special Investigation Officer'. In addition he sought permission to employ a naval cipher clerk.⁴⁴ The following revealing reply from Duff Cooper, the Ambassador in Paris would tend to imply that a senior member of the DST, Maurice Cottentin, was prepared, unknown to his superiors, to work for the British

New Head of Surveillance for whole Mediterranean littoral Monsieur Cottentin, who will shortly be arriving in Marseilles, has promised his assistance in watching and controlling this traffic. His co-operation will be given unofficially and without the knowledge of his superiors. You should therefore make no use of any information he may provide which could conceivably compromise him. You should not, repeat not, inform him of our connections with P...

Monsieur Cottentin can now be asked to investigate any questions on which we need information. Moreover as you know contacts with P have now been taken off your hands. We understand that Foreign Office are reluctant to arrange for a special investigating officer to be sent out...⁴⁵

Given the pro-Zionist attitude of his boss, Roger Wybot, the Director of the DST, it is more than likely that Cottentin was deliberately using his connections with the British Embassy to maintain watch on the intelligence gathering activities of the SIS. Later in June 1948, after the creation of the State of Israel, Cottentin was to be instrumental in providing a secure environment for the loading of arms onto the Irgun ship, the Altalena.⁴⁶ (See Chapter 8)

The operations of the SIS in the Marseilles area revealed to the DST that the main agent suspected of being at the centre of this activity was a British officer called Captain Frederic Harold Courtney.⁴⁷ He was passing himself off as a representative of the wine merchants Val Fleuron de Cassis. This position afforded him a ready contact with merchant navy officers, ship owners and the port authorities, all of whom could keep him informed of traffic through the ports in the area. In this task he also made use of dozens of local French agents, the use of RAF Lancasters from the British base at Istres for photography purposes and a yacht called the Lady Ann, skippered by an ex-navy

⁴³ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 148.

⁴⁴ TNA, CO 537/1804 30.11.46.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.12.46.

⁴⁶ Documents supplied by Schlomo Nakdimon., 3.6.04. Exchange of correspondence between Nakdimon and Cottentin, April/May 1972.

captain called Merlin. The latter's remit was to note the movement of all ships out of the ports around Marseilles.⁴⁸ Further proof of Courtney's existence and activities is borne out in a report of one of Avraham Polonski's men following the departure of the illegal ship, the President Warfield from Sète on 11th July

And now a pretty important matter, which I believe has to be dealt with by us and not the Mossad, and which, in my view, puts at risk the progress and security of all our present and future work. I refer to the warning letters sent by the "Defenders of the Arabs" to them [crew members?] and other 'Goyim' [non-Jews] working for us. It is very probable that this campaign is led by a captain of the British I.S., who lives in Marseilles and is particularly focused on the Jewish Question. I am certain, as is my informer, that this captain is doing his utmost to cause us difficulties... The man is called Fred Cokney or Cokny. He lives at the Hotel Beauveau. He often seeks information at the Grand Hotel in Marseilles which is the meeting place of many of our Goyim.. I believe that he uses bribes to obtain information where he can, and that he or his henchmen are the authors of these letters... I am sure that by using our brains we will be able to clarify this matter and hopefully resolve it.⁴⁹

The warning letters referred to were the subject of a file note by Maurice Cottentin, the DST's representative in the Marseilles sector. Under the subject heading of "Activité du réseau Trikabimasion", he stated that a certain number of French Jews, who were probably suspected of having helped the immigrants to board the Exodus, had received threatening letters, on behalf of "the Defenders of the Arabs of Palestine" stamped with a red hand. Cottentin suggested that the vain attempt in one of the letter's paragraphs to appear anti-British pointed, in effect, to the SIS as being the originator of the letters.⁵⁰

This story is possibly only one manifestation of a much wider conspiracy. In June, July and September 1947, letters from the "Defenders of Arab Palestine" were sent in either English or French to the Italian Minister in London, Greek Ministers and officials, HM consul in Piraeus, the British Embassy in Paris and HM Consuls in Marseilles and Lyon. This orchestrated letter campaign complained about the laxity of the local officials in permitting illegal immigration to Palestine and of the weakness of the British in

⁴⁷ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/1.

⁴⁸ Philippe Bernert, *Roger Wybot et la Bataille pour la DST* (Paris, 1975), 157.

⁴⁹ Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files, Unsigned report dated 20th July 1947 dealing with the departure of the Exodus '47.

⁵⁰ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2, File note by Maurice Cottentin, 18.9.47.

bringing pressure to bear on the governments of those countries and finished by threatening retaliatory action. More specifically the letter to the British Embassy in Paris in September 1947 stated categorically that the “Défenseurs des Arabes de Palestine” were responsible for the blowing up of the ships Vrissi in Genoa and the Pan Crescent.⁵¹ Similar letters were received by the MAE and French Consulates.⁵²

Liebreich in his book asserts that the steam yacht Vrissi had been prepared for illegal immigration by the Irgun and that it sank after an explosion on the 11th July 1947 in Genoa. He states that suspicion fell on the British Secret Service who had delegated the operation to Lt. Commander Crabb, Head of the Allied Navies’ Underwater Experimental Station in San Andrea, Venice.⁵³ As to the Pan Crescent, it was damaged by an explosion on 30th August 1947 in Porto Marghera, near Venice.⁵⁴ It was subsequently repaired and later used to transport illegal immigrants from Bulgaria. Again Liebreich indicates that Commander Crabb was possibly responsible, having employed an Italian shipyard employee to place a time bomb inside one of the holds.⁵⁵ No conclusive evidence is presented that the SIS was indeed responsible for both incidents nor that equally it was the author of the threatening letters. But is it purely coincidental that (a) Cottentin believed the letter campaign in Marseilles to have been instigated by the SIS, that (b) One of the “Defenders” letters accepts responsibility for explosions on the Vrissi and the Pan Crescent and that (c) Liebreich using his own sources points the finger at a Royal Navy officer who was an expert in underwater torpedoes and limpet mines?

An indication of the lengths to which the SIS were prepared to go is given in André Blumel’s unpublished and handwritten account of the Exodus Affair. He alleges that Courtney’s task was to avoid the use of British sailors [presumably off the Palestinian coast] but to use all possible means to prevent an illegal embarkation, either by causing problems for the boat or blowing it up. Courtney in effect specifically warned

⁵¹ TNA, FO 371/61935. Copies of relevant letters.

⁵² MAE Archives, Immigration, File 376.

⁵³ Liebreich, 80.

⁵⁴ TNA, CO 537/2379, Letter From Rome Embassy to Foreign Office, 27.9.47. The Embassy confirmed that the Italian Foreign Ministry had been warned about serious international complications if the Pan Crescent succeeded in picking up immigrants. A British Field Security Police inspection had already discovered newly-fitted passenger accommodation and anti-boarding devices.

⁵⁵ Many years later, Commander Crabb disappeared during an underwater mission to inspect a Russian warship then visiting Great Britain.

the English agents [SIS] that such an act of sabotage should not be carried out in a French port in order not to reveal Britain's role in this affair.⁵⁶

A further indication of the concern created by SIS activity is provided by Georges Loinger, recruited to the Mossad at the end of 1946. When he arrived in Marseilles and reported to 'Rudi' Zameret, he was told that his first task would be to help flush out SIS agents. To do this, it was put about that Loinger was somehow connected with illegal immigration. It was hoped that this would cause him to be followed by British agents. The idea was that Zameret's own people would in turn carry out their own surveillance, identify the agents and pinpoint their location. Once this information was passed to Wybot's DST, it was hoped that some counter action would follow.⁵⁷ A report from the RG speaks of an English official who appeared to belong to the Intelligence Services. He had apparently approached the Gendarmerie in La Ciotat, near Marseilles with the intention of procuring information on Jewish illegal immigration activities which had occurred in the area. In view of the delicate nature of the subject no information was supplied.⁵⁸

A few months after the Exodus Affair, Wybot finally acted against the SIS in the Marseilles area. DST representatives warned Captain Courtney's fifteen or so French agents that they risked imprisonment unless they ceased their spying activities.⁵⁹ On 5th November 1947, on the strength of a ministerial decree, Captain Courtney himself was expelled from French territory.⁶⁰ The SIS cell in Marseilles was thus effectively neutralised.

The British Secret Service was one of many foreign intelligence agencies reported to be operating in France in the post-war years. This is disclosed in a remarkable booklet published by the DST for internal consumption in the Ministry of the Interior.⁶¹ It refers specifically to the activities of MI6 (SIS) whose operational remit was outside the United Kingdom. It also stated that MI5 officers, although strictly UK based, were allowed to have some officers in France. British Consulates, located in major towns in

⁵⁶ Haganah Archives, Blumel Files 123/Blumel/1.

⁵⁷ Interview with Georges Loinger in Paris, 10.11.02.

⁵⁸ Archives départementales des BDR. 148W185, RG report, 15.11.46.

⁵⁹ Bernet, 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*.

France, provided cover for the SIS. Its officers were prevalent in the visa and passport sections and in the press and information sections. It was even suggested that officers in the Allied War Graves Commission might also be involved. SIS activities in France continued to be intense and one of their major objectives was the surveillance of all boats susceptible of carrying arms or immigrants to Palestine. Local agents were recruited among Frenchmen, who had previously been organised into resistance cells by SOE officers during the war. In another section of the report, undoubtedly referring to Captain Frederic Courtney, although not specifically by name, the DST reported that in 1947 they expelled from France an intelligence officer who had created in the Midi area of France an anti-Zionist network of agents. He was reputed to have been implicated in the interception of the Exodus. The report concludes with the statement that a large number of SIS agents had been identified and were under surveillance.

Hadari (originally known as Venya Pomerantz in his Mossad days) relates an interview he had with Frank Bateman, a Jew, working for the SIS in Italy and France in 1947. According to Bateman, who spoke both Yiddish and Hebrew, the SIS used as many as 500 agents in their quest to impede illegal immigration. These also comprised demolition experts, frogmen and radio interception specialists. Bateman himself managed to infiltrate one of the transit camps in the Marseilles area in order to familiarise himself with the workings of the organisers. Another agent called Betty Fidler was aboard the Farida (later renamed the Af-Al-Pi-Chen), when it was intercepted, as a result of her signal to a British destroyer in the vicinity of the Palestine coast.⁶² The name of Betty Fidler also crops up in a security report in September 1947. Soldiers intervened when she was attacked by one of the passengers at the moment she attempted to disembark from the Farida at the docks in Haifa.⁶³

The work of the British Secret Services was highly professional and comprehensive but it was at all times exposed to the vigilance of the DST. They in turn kept the Mossad informed of any SIS moves which could interfere with their activities. British Intelligence failed in its primary task of preventing the sailing of illegal

⁶¹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Jules Moch, 484AP14, DST-La Lutte contre les ingérences étrangères en France: Sommaire sur les Principaux Services Spéciaux Etrangers et leurs Activités sur le Territoire, Paris 1.1.48.

⁶² Hadari, *Voyage to Freedom*, 61.

⁶³ TNA, WO 275/87, Report of 317 Field Security Section of 6th Airborne Division, 28.9.47.

immigrant ships from France. However, it did give early warning to the British Embassy in Paris of suspect boats and, in due course, their sailing dates which enabled the Palestine Patrol to carry out its interception work.

Such is the nature of intelligence work that whilst the SIS was battling its unidentified enemy, the Mossad across Europe, its opposite numbers responsible for counter-espionage in Great Britain, MI5 was in indirect contact with Jewish Agency (Haganah) intelligence officers in London. This is revealed in a series of documents from MI5 released by the National Archives in April 2003. The major revelation of these documents is that in a period stretching from August 1946 to March 1947, an officer acting on behalf of MI5 had a number of meetings with a “Jewish Agency Security Officer.”⁶⁴

Despite the general blocking-out of the name of this “officer” on all the documents, an inadvertent manuscript note identified him as being “Kollek”. Clearly this was Teddy Kollek who, later in life, became famous as the long-term mayor and developer of Jerusalem. However at the time he was known, as French reports have also indicated, to be a Haganah intelligence officer.⁶⁵ It was clear to MI5 that Kollek, acting on behalf of the Jewish Agency, was seeking to establish direct lines of communication with MI5, much in the same way that he had succeeded in doing in the Middle East with the British Intelligence Agency (SIME) and two of its senior officers Lt.Colonel Oldfield and Brigadier Douglas Roberts.

In London Kollek had contact with a Mr. C.A.G. Simkins, who worked in the War Office. Unbeknown to Kollek, Simkins reported directly to MI5, under the code name of ‘Scorpion’ and was the main conduit for Kollek’s various observations and disclosures. In September 1946, at a time when certain leaders of the Executive of the Jewish Agency were still interned by the British in Latrun, Kollek described to Simkins the para-military organisations then existing in Palestine. He asserted that there was a clear distinction between the “Resistance Movement”, an offspring of the Haganah, which had always taken the greatest care to avoid loss of life, and the Irgun, which he characterised as being composed of Fascist-minded people and the Palestine underworld.

⁶⁴ TNA, KV4/216, Memo to D.D.B. from B3a (J.C. Robertson), 29.8.46.

In addition there was the more formidable and ideologically-driven Stern Group. He asserted that after the attack by the Irgun on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the Haganah had, in July 1946, broken off all relations with these two organisations. He also indicated that an important meeting was being held in Paris that week to decide on participation in the London Conference. Kollek stated to Simkins "Our task is to avoid war between England and the Jews."⁶⁶

In October 1946, after the adjournment of the London Conference, Kollek wrote to Simkins indicating that the British Government was pursuing informal talks with the Jewish Agency. The Agency indicated to the Government representative that their demands were twofold. Firstly the release of its leaders, which would open the path to a discussion on partition and secondly increased immigration to say 5,000 per month, a stop on searches of settlements, release of detainees and re-establishment of civil rights and habeas corpus. If these conditions were met there would be Anglo-Jewish cooperation which would make the Agency an active and effective partner in "isolating and eventually annihilating the terrorist groups."⁶⁷

At a further meeting in January 1947, Kollek indicated that he would soon be returning to Palestine as he had failed in his mission to establish direct contact with people in the British establishment who would appreciate the strategic benefit that a Jewish State would represent. In his view the British were in a position to give the Jews what they wanted. The Arab League had no wish to see the involvement of Russia in the Middle East and would acquiesce. He contended that with Jewish co-operation the problem of terrorism could be dealt with inside two months. With regard to British fears of Russian infiltration into Palestine through a mass illegal immigration from Central and Eastern Europe, Kollek indicated that the immigrants were coming not to spread Communism but to get away from it.⁶⁸

At all times during this brief and indirect encounter with Kollek, MI5 attempted to ensure that that he remained unaware of the true relationship between Simkins and themselves. They feared that any direct contact would, besides enabling the Jewish

⁶⁵ Archives Nationales, F1a/3368, an RG report confirms that Theodor Kollek, born in Austria on 27.5.11 was known to be a Jewish intelligence officer. He had arrived from London on 10.8.46 and had booked into the Royal Monceau, 13.8.46.

⁶⁶TNA, KV4/216. Report of Simkins on his discussions with Kollek, 16.9.46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Letter from Kollek to Simkins, 8.10.46.

Agency to infiltrate MI5, “involve the risk that the Jewish Agency might attempt to publicise this liaison in future, in order to demonstrate the closeness of their collaboration with British Intelligence and thereby to clear themselves of responsibility for the activities of the Jewish terrorists.”⁶⁹ Whether Kollek was truly unaware of Simkins’s connection to MI5 is open to doubt, given the manner in which he was constantly feeding him with information to be passed on to influential decision makers.

One of the last meetings with Kollek appears to have been with his old contact in the Middle East, Brigadier Douglas Roberts, who then reported back to Robertson at MI5. Kollek again attempted to put British fears about Communist infiltration at rest. He indicated that the only collaboration with the Russians concerned illegal immigration. There was an understanding on the subject. The Russians wanted to get rid of Jews in countries under their control and the Agency was only too keen to receive them in Palestine.⁷⁰

This review of recently released MI5 documentation serves to emphasise how, despite events in Palestine and the war being waged by both sides over illegal immigration, unofficial lines of communication between the intelligence communities of both the Jewish Agency and the British establishment continued to remain open, even if in the end they did not result in shifting British policy on Palestine.

⁶⁸ TNA, KV4/216, Notes on a meeting between ‘Scorpion’ and [Kollek] of the Jewish Agency on 30.1.47.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Memo from B3a (J.C. Robertson) to B3 Robertson raises the question as to whether or not MI5 should establish a link with [Kollek] who had proved a fruitful source of intelligence in the Middle East, 6.2.47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Memo from B3a (J.C. Robertson) to B3, 14. 3.47.

CHAPTER 5 The French Connection

The French Connection is basically a short-hand device to identify the extensive help given to illegal immigration by a number of French Ministers and Government officials. By supporting the existing anecdotal narrative with an array of archival documents, which provide compelling evidence, the ultimate conclusion is that these facilitators did not just demonstrate a benign attitude but their actual complicity in the process. Equally, it will be shown that they were so adept at creating a smoke-screen over their activities, that not only were their colleagues in the various coalition cabinets unaware of their true involvement but so were many minor officials under their direct control.

However the starting point to such an exposé must be an examination of the motives which drove these facilitators. Secondly the need is to assess how motivation translated itself into practical steps. A third element is an assessment of how British diplomatic pressure, which caused inter-ministerial conflicts, proved in the end to be counter-productive and effectively only served the Mossad. This chapter also illustrates the enduring contradictions and ambiguities within the Government coalitions towards the whole question of Palestine, which prevented any real consensus.

5.1 A question of Motivation

It might seem paradoxical that within two years of the demise of the Antisemitic Vichy regime, many in the post-war French Government were covertly assisting the Mossad in their activities on French soil. To unearth the real motivations behind this phenomenon, one has to consider a number of historical factors and their influence on French attitudes.

There is firstly the ancient Franco-British rivalry which, whilst relatively dormant during the war years, as befits allies, raised its head once again when France was able to recover its full sovereignty after the war. There is then the humiliation of the French army being forced out of Lebanon and Syria in 1946, as part of arrangements which involved British policy in those countries. This left the French with the suspicion that the British had connived with the indigenous leadership at their

expulsion from the Levant.¹ Perhaps also the memory of the attack by the Royal Navy on the French fleet at Mers-El-Khebir in July 1940, in which 1,200 sailors lost their lives, was also not entirely a dormant factor affecting the Franco-British entente. On the military front the contribution of Palestinian Jews in the battle of Bir Hakeim, amongst others, was often commended by General Pierre Koenig of the Free French Forces and thus the French military were inclined to favour the Zionists.² Lastly there were the ties which bound certain members of the French Administration to the Zionist cause. Many of the Ministers in the coalition Government were Socialists who had retained a high regard for Léon Blum, the Jewish Prime Minister of the 1936/38 Popular Front Governments. Those who had been in the Resistance, had encountered Jewish members, both French and foreign, and felt that they owed them a debt of gratitude. This was equally reflected in their affinity for their Socialist counterparts within the Jewish Agency. Thus when the Mossad sought at least French acquiescence to their operations in France, they were pushing against an open door.

Weighing up all these diverse factors, it appears that the major impetus for French complicity -and this is a recurring theme- was a subconscious desire to get back at the British for France's expulsion from the Levant states. As Georges Loinger, ex-member of the Mossad, contended "The French administration hated the British for this humiliation and that is why they helped us."³ Even Sir John Beith, a senior official at the British Foreign Office, later identified this particular issue as a key motivating factor dictating France's attitude over illegal immigration.⁴ What then was the root cause for such animosity and was it justified?

After the First World War, the League of Nations granted Mandates over parts of the former Ottoman Empire to both Britain and France. With Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq) going to Britain, France gained control of Lebanon and Syria. In June 1940, despite the fall of continental France, the Armistice Agreement signed with the Germans allowed France to retain control of its overseas Empire. Thus countries bordering on Mandate Palestine were occupied by military forces loyal to the new

¹ Joseph Kennet, *L'Angleterre, la France et l'Immigration Clandestine en Palestine, 1945-1948*. Master's Dissertation (Paris, 1985), 280.

² *Ibid.*, 269.

³ Interview with Georges Loinger, 10.11.02.

⁴ Elihu Bergman, "Adversaries and Facilitators: The Unconventional Diplomacy of Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948", *Israel Affairs*, No. 8, Spring, (London, 2002), 19. Bergman's interview with Sir John Beith, 15.8.47.

Vichy Government. It was only in 1941, when a revolt in Iraq, led by a supporter of the Axis, brought in its wake the use of aerodromes in Syria by the German air force, that consideration was given, by the British, to an invasion of the Levant States. The purpose was to block any possibility of the Germans using these countries as a base for an offensive against British forces in the area.

The invasion was led in the main by Australian and British forces with de Gaulle's Free French forces in support, led by General Catroux. A political dimension was added to the military offensive by a simultaneous declaration by Catroux to the two populations that their countries would be granted independence in the future. To augment the effectiveness of this declaration -the Free French, not possessing much credibility in this part of the world- it was underwritten by a guarantee from the British Government.⁵ The intention was to maintain forces in the region until the end of the war, when they would be withdrawn and the independence of the two states become a reality. The arrangements whereby French and British forces coalesced in the Levant were incorporated in an agreement signed by de Gaulle and Oliver Lyttelton, the Minister of State in Cairo, in July 1941. The agreement, whilst underlining the pledge of independence given to both Lebanon and Syria, recognised the pre-eminent position of the Free French in all matters concerned with these Levant States.⁶

Major-General Sir Edward Spears was personally appointed by Churchill to head the British Mission to the Levant States and also to act as Head of Mission to the Free French forces.⁷ Later in February 1942 his political rank was elevated to that of Minister. After the defeat of France in June 1940, he had personally brought General de Gaulle over to England to continue the fight and from then on acted as his liaison with the British Government. He therefore had no illusions about the difficulties of the task facing him, nor of the irascible and suspicious nature of de Gaulle, as the leader of the Free French.

In his memoirs, Spears often speaks disparagingly of French attempts to restore their hegemony in the area despite Catroux's declaration. He recalls that the French feared that the British were intent on replacing them in the Levant. He is fond of repeating Churchill's comment that the British had not sent troops into the Levant

⁵ Edward Spears, *Fulfillment of a Mission* (London, 1977), 99. Hereafter Spears.

⁶ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault 457AP3, Letter from Oliver Lyttelton to General de Gaulle, 25.7.41.

for the purpose of replacing one type of Frenchman [supporters of Vichy] by another [the Free French].⁸ Despite Spears's claim that his main objective was to ensure that the British guarantee to the two states was upheld, there is no hiding his contempt for de Gaulle's representatives, who were intent in maintaining the Levant as part of France's empire.

Possibly that which enraged and humiliated the French most was Spears's part in the British intervention of November 1943. A new Lebanese Parliament had just been elected, the nationalist flavour of which displeased the French. Without consulting the British, who militarily were the strongest forces in the area, de Gaulle's representative on 11th November arrested virtually all the members of the Government and suspended the constitution. The British Ministers thereupon issued an ultimatum that unless the position was restored by the 22nd November, martial law would be declared and the country taken in charge by the British army.⁹ After a period of stand-off in which French troops rampaged throughout Lebanon, causing a number of casualties, de Gaulle, from his headquarters in Algiers, finally backed down. The Government Ministers were released and reinstated in their functions.

De Gaulle recognising that he had been forced to concede because of the inherent weakness of his forces in the Levant, was more than ever convinced that Spears had influenced both the Syrians and the Lebanese to stand up to the French. Georges Bidault castigates both de Gaulle and Spears in his memoirs for France's debacle in the Levant. De Gaulle is accused of lack of clarity on the subject at cabinet meetings and deliberately circumventing Bidault by issuing his own instructions to his representatives in the area. Bidault complains that although he was the Minister in Charge "No one ever informed me, orally or in writing, about what was going on". As to General Spears, he was accused of making things worse by actions which humiliated the French. Bidault contents himself with a schadenfreude reflection that "the British had chased us out of the Middle East; but once they had sawn off our branch, the entire tree finally fell on their heads."¹⁰ He was of course referring to Britain's subsequent problems in Palestine and Egypt.

⁷ Spears introduction viii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁰ Georges Bidault, Resistance: The Political Biography of Georges Bidault (London, 1967), 97/98.

De Gaulle's suspicion of Spears was shared by members of the British Foreign Office under Anthony Eden, for though Spears acted in a political capacity, he was not on the staff of the Foreign Office, his appointment having been made directly by Churchill. A revealing letter is quoted by Spears in his memoirs. The letter had been addressed to Churchill by the Ambassador to the French National Committee in Algiers, Arthur Duff Cooper, later to become Ambassador in France. A copy of the letter was included in Duff Cooper's memoirs many years later and Spears was made aware of it. The letter dated February 1944 relates to both Spears and his wife

She and her husband believe that the main object of their mission is to maintain the rights of the native population of the Levant against the dominant power, and even to encourage the natives to assert these rights. That is not, in my view, nor I believe the view of His Majesty's Government. We have surely enough problems of our own to face without stirring up native problems for others... Spears, owing to what I think is a mistaken view of his local objective, seems to have... become definitely, if not violently, francophobe... I do not believe there will be peace in the Levant as long as they [the Spears] remain there.¹¹

Spears happily relates that Churchill dismissed any suggestion of his recall and, as always, stood by him. Nevertheless, at the end of 1944, Spears resigned and returned of his own accord to London to stand in the General Election. In his final comments, Spears notes that the French, dismayed at their inability to tie the Syrians down by a treaty, bombarded Damascus in May 1945. They then suffered the ignominy of being escorted out by British troops and being taken to Lebanon for their own protection.¹²

As a sequel to this story, it appears that at the end of 1946 the Mossad passed on to the French, copies of Spears's files that had been captured during the ambush of a military vehicle in Palestine. In view of Spears's perceived involvement in the ejection of the French out of the Levant, this gift of the Mossad to their French counterparts at the DST, could only cement the already existing relationship even further.¹³ According to Roger Wybot, the documents contained the names of British

¹¹ Spears, 292/293.

¹² *Ibid.*, 298.

¹³ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 144.

agents, active in Arab countries who might one day turn up in North Africa and France. He was therefore happy to be able to identify them in advance.¹⁴

Corroboration for Spears's assertions that the French were constantly fearful of a British take-over in the Levant was found in a number of War Office files. In a communication to British troops after the confinement of French troops to barracks in Syria, the General Officer Commanding states

On June 15th and 19th the Levant situation was debated in the French Assembly. Mr Bidault and General de Gaulle defended the French actions and the latter made ill-tempered references to Great Britain... The average Frenchman is nowadays convinced that Great Britain is trying to "steal Syria from France". This conviction fits all too well with the suspicions of British intentions in the Levant which the French have nursed since the last war... It is strengthened by every report which reaches Paris of the action we have been compelled to take to prevent further disorders, protect French lives and keep things going in these countries... In these circumstances, we are compelled to avoid any action which is not absolutely essential if it is likely to lend colour to the accusation that we are trying to usurp France's position in the Levant.¹⁵

The Manchester Guardian in an editorial on the Levant recognised that British policy had two choices: either to appease Arab nationalism or to resist it. For better or for worse, recognising its growing force, it had opted for appeasement

We earned a good mark with the Arabs by granting independence to Iraq and by closing Palestine to Jewish immigration, though we had our troubles in Egypt and elsewhere. Though at present Arab nationalism is directed against France, it is potentially as great a threat to our own position [which was to remain in the Middle East for the sake of strategic and economic interests].¹⁶

It could be argued that Britain's timely military interventions, which impeded France in her desire to restore its hegemony in the Levant, created a form of French paranoia which the British, although aware of, were unable to dispel. That this mindset led post-war French governments to assist -as a retaliation for their loss of their

¹⁴ Bernet, 59.

¹⁵ TNA, WO 202/112a, 6.8.45.

¹⁶ Manchester Guardian, 6.6.45.

Mandate- those intent on removing Britain's own Mandate over Palestine, has an attractive logic to it.

Despite these ingrained attitudes towards the British, *realpolitik* dictated that, at least in matters affecting the economic viability of France, the foreign policy of the Quai d'Orsay was one of accommodation with Great Britain. This attitude did not commend itself to General de Gaulle whilst he was still head of the Provisional Government. In an angry letter to the Minister of State at the MAE he strongly criticised the attitude of the French Ambassador in London, Massigli, and the General Secretary of the MAE, Chauvel. In his view they were involved in a conspiracy with the British to effect the total expulsion of the French from the Lebanon and Syria, whilst the British remained in Palestine, Iraq and Egypt. As to Bidault, de Gaulle described him as totally blind to what was happening and deaf to his words of warning. He now insisted that no further steps be taken on this "capital issue" until he had convened a Cabinet meeting at which he would correct the misleading information ministers had been fed.¹⁷ This was not the only issue on which the cabinet opposed de Gaulle and on the 20th January 1946 he resigned from the Government. Before the end of the year France had left the Levant. From this moment on, Bidault was left virtually in sole charge of Foreign policy. His efforts to curb illegal immigration from France and his prevarication over the Partition vote in November 1947 reflected, according to Tsilla Hersco "the entrenched pro-Arab bias which had always been prevalent at the Quai d'Orsay."¹⁸ However Bidault was also shown to be capable of being persuaded by other arguments, as his role in the Altalena Affair was to prove.

In discreet opposition to the attitudes of the Quai d'Orsay were the humanitarian and generally pro-Zionist attitudes of the Socialist Ministers represented by Jules Moch, Edouard Depreux and Daniel Mayer, who took their inspiration from Léon Blum now outside Government. Blum, however was recalled to lead the coalition for a brief one month spell in December 1946. All the while, as Political Director of Le Populaire, the mouthpiece of the SFIO, he ensured that Socialists provided Zionism the moral support it required.

¹⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds Vincent Auriol 552AP37, General de Gaulle to Francisque Gay, 4.1.46.

¹⁸ Hersco, 44.

Part of the explanation for this friendly attitude towards Zionists was provided by Daniel Mayer, the General Secretary of the SFIO at a meeting of Poalei Zion, one of the left wing Zionist parties in France. He indicated that during the war funds, provided by the Joint, were used by Marc Jarblum for the relief of French Socialists and their families forced to live a clandestine existence.¹⁹ This philanthropic act was confirmed by Edouard Depreux in his memoirs: "It was in Lyon that I had numerous contacts with Mr. Jarblum, who courageously and with great tact brought relief, with the funds at his disposal, to the most needy of the victims of Hitlerite and Vichy racism, particularly families of those imprisoned or deported..."²⁰

These gestures were not forgotten after the war when certain Socialist politicians found themselves members of the coalition Government. They were also moved to make amends for Vichy's active participation in the deportation of a quarter of the Jews of France, by a flexible attitude to refugees wishing to cross France to its ports on the Mediterranean coast.

Jules Moch in his memoirs devotes only one and a half pages to a subject which must have been one of his preoccupations during his tenure as Minister of Works and Transport. Nevertheless his tongue-in-cheek revelations are quite instructive as to his personal involvement and commitment. His opening statement sets out clearly the source of his motivation: "In 1946-1947, the Jews were my principal worry, not because of religious solidarity -I am an agnostic- nor even because of national identity -I am French, descendant of a long line of officers-, but because, massacred in their millions by Hitler, persecuted in Russia, in Austria or in the Balkans, the Jews were the most unhappy of men."²¹

Clearly Moch was keen to reassure his readers that although he was a Jew this was not the cause of his motivation. His reference to the military background of his French ancestry was a subtle way to dispel any suspicions that race or religion played any part. This distancing technique was similarly used by Daniel Mayer when he attended, at the request of Marc Jarblum, the Poalei Zion meeting in March 1945. From the outset he was keen to establish that he came to them solely as a Frenchman and in the name of the French Socialist party addressing a fraternal party. He asserted

¹⁹ Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files, Minutes of Poalei Zion Meeting, 1.3.45.

²⁰ Depreux, *Souvenirs d'un Militant*, 173.

²¹ Moch, *Une si Longue Vie*, 252

that “ Socialists do not recognise the concept of race”.²² One can also see traces of this defensive approach by Rene Mayer, also Jewish, in the slightly obsequious style of his letter to Bidault in 1947 disclosing his unhappiness about the proposed French position on the Partition Plan for Palestine. (See later)

Plainly, Jewish politicians were keen to establish their credentials as being first and foremost Frenchmen owing only allegiance to the country of their birth. As with Léon Blum they did not hide the fact that they were Jews but resented any suggestion that this was a motivating force for their pro-Zionist attitudes. So soon after the war, with the Vichy days of anti-Jewish discrimination fresh in their minds, such a defensive attitude was understandable.

In referring to well-known events in the history of illegal immigration from France, Moch relates his own positive contribution: “I dealt with shipments by sea to Israel; with Sète, where I was elected, at the head of this traffic, I was involved in two dramas, that of the Exodus and that of the Altalena... I refused to let Bevin, Socialist Foreign Minister in London, know of the date of departure of this boat, the President Warfield [Exodus]...”²³ In respect of the British decision to ship the former passengers of the Exodus to Hamburg, he comments: “We found no way to prevent this act of savagery.” With regard to the Altalena, the Irgun ship which shipped arms and personnel to Israel during the first truce, Moch reveals where his personal loyalties lay

Bidault, true friend of Israel, came to find me at Place Beauvau [Moch replaced Depreux at the Ministry of the Interior in November 1947] to ask me to permit the passage of a shipment of arms. My usual informants had not whispered a word about this. When I called them in, they indicated that the arms were for a rival organisation, on the extreme right. I could not confiscate these arms without making Bidault an enemy of Israel, whilst as Head of the Government, he regularly closed his eyes to all my actions [Presumably in favour of the Zionists].

The implication is that, soon after Bidault informed him that Port-de-Bouc was the port of departure, Moch quickly passed on this information to his friends in the new State of Israel to enable them to intercept the Altalena and “the arms purchased by the dissidents”.²⁴

²² Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files. Minutes of Poalei Zion meeting, 1.3.45.

²³ Moch, 253.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Whilst direct documentary evidence of Moch's assistance to the Mossad in their illegal immigration activities is not revealed even in his personal papers at the French National archives, he does often provide hints. In a report entitled 'Secret Note on voyage to Israel in 1949' he comments on the "humanitarian action of the [French] Government in allowing the passage and embarkation of these unfortunate escapees from the DP camps without paying too much attention to their legal status".²⁵

A more direct account of the direct assistance given by Jules Moch is provided by the commander of the *Ulua*, which arrived in Le Havre from Sweden at the end of 1946 with some 1000 Jewish refugees on board. At the insistence of the British Embassy, the boat was prevented from leaving on the basis that she was unseaworthy to carry so many passengers. The young Palestinian commander on board, Arie Eliav, telephoned Ehud Avriel at the Mossad office in Paris to tell him of their predicament and requesting that a way be found to effect the ship's release. Immediately contact was established with Jules Moch himself and he gave direct orders to the maritime officials in Le Havre to issue a seaworthiness certificate for the boat so that she could no longer be held in any port under French control. Thus the *Ulua* was able to continue her journey to Algiers to pick up more immigrants and continue her journey to Palestine. After interception by the Royal Navy she was beached on the shore near Haifa.²⁶

5.2 Practical help

The manner in which French complicity in the illegal immigration process found its practical application is revealed in a number of anecdotes, supported broadly by archival sources. Roger Wybot, director of the DST, was originally a member of de Gaulle's entourage during the war. From London he accomplished the task of setting up for de Gaulle a very efficient service called the Bureau Central des Renseignements et d'Action which regrouped all the means of communication and espionage in war-time France. After the liberation of France, his appointment to the newly-created DST Agency was a natural outcome.

²⁵ Archives Nationales, Fonds Jules Moch, 484AP74. Note: Author's underlining is for emphasis.

²⁶ Telephone interview with Arie 'Lova' Eliav, 25.11.03.

In the summer of 1946 his agents, on the look-out for illicit radio transmissions out of France, detected coded radio signals originating from a Jewish children's home of the religious Mizrachi organisation at 19, rue de la Pièce-d'Eau, in Le Vesinet, a suburb of Paris. It had been installed by Serge Perl, one of Polonski's men.²⁷ A raid by DST agents on 27th September 1946 at 7 o'clock in the morning led to the discovery of a radio transmitter, hidden in the gatekeeper's lodge. Its three young operators, posing as child carers, together with the director of the establishment were arrested. The three operators, carrying false identity papers, refused to disclose their true identities. As the transmissions were being made to Cremoné in Italy it was suspected that the men, who bore foreign accents, were Germans in communication with fascist counterparts.

It soon emerged however, thanks to the intervention of the lawyer and Zionist André Blumel with Edouard Depreux, that the men were from the Mossad. Blumel explained to Wybot that they were working for Jewish immigration to Palestine and vouched that they were no danger to France. Wybot's response was to indicate to the agents that, whilst he could not permit coded radio emissions out of France without knowing their contents, he was prepared to do a deal. Against the supply of the radio codes used by the Mossad and regular English translations, he would provide whatever assistance was required in their endeavours. In particular he would inform them of the activities of the SIS which, to his knowledge, had set up a network extending from Paris to Marseilles to keep the British Embassy informed of all illegal immigrant ship movements to Palestine. He emphasised that it was nevertheless essential for the Mossad to act in France with all due diligence so as not to embarrass the French Government vis-à-vis the British.

The men of the DST would continue to monitor illegal transmissions from whatever source and it was up to the Mossad to act on Wybot's advice and curtail their transmissions to no more than three minutes duration to escape detection. Otherwise further arrests would inevitably follow, which Wybot would do his best to resolve. What he proposed was a form of benign neutrality, which would not preclude the supply of genuine, if misleading, identity papers if the need arose. The Mossad's men

²⁷ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, 93.

were then released but had to report to the police every day for a few months. This allowed the DST time to ensure that the code book was genuine.²⁸

Other radio operators shipped into France by the Mossad from Palestine, would, after the Vesinet affair, be protected from the inquisitiveness of the SIS by the DST.²⁹ Even André Blumel was involved with secret radio transmitters. He arranged the installation of the principal transmitter of the Haganah in his mother's villa at St. Germain-en-Laye, a Paris suburb.³⁰ All this was carried out under the watchful eye of Pierre Boursicot the Director General of the Sûreté Nationale and Roger Wybot's boss.³¹

The communications system set up in France, with the covert blessing of the French authorities, was essential to the Mossad's activities. In addition to the transmitter set up in the outskirts of Paris, others were set up in the Marseilles area as it was the centre for maritime operations. From these centres and one established in Italy, "Gideonim" (nickname for the radio operators) were able to maintain contact with the Mossad in Palestine and their counterparts on illegal immigration ships at sea.³² Ze'ev Hadari recalls an incident when each time he attempted to drive to the location outside Paris to use the transmitter, he was followed by British Secret Agents, in turn followed by the DST and he had to abort his visit. They all ended up in the same café en route, seemingly all studiously ignoring each other. The problem was eventually resolved by delegating the task to L'Abbé Glasberg. "No-one followed a priest."³³

Wybot, in his memoirs, identifies clearly with the Zionist cause and indicates how closely he and his deputy, Stanislas Mangin, kept Edouard Depreux and André Blumel informed of all moves by the SIS which could imperil the activities of the Mossad.³⁴ That this warm relationship established between Zionist circles and the DST continued after the creation of the State of Israel is illustrated by two separate items of information, which one might speculate were interlinked.

²⁸ Bernert, 153/155.

²⁹ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, 96.

³⁰ Zertal « Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle », 421.

³¹ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, 97.

³² Hadari, *Hamossad*, 11.

³³ Lucien Lazare, *L'Abbé Glasberg*, (Paris, 1990), 92.

³⁴ Bernert, 157.

The first item is a lunch organised by Marc Jarblum which brought together André Blumel, Roger Wybot and Stanislas Mangin at his flat in Paris in February 1949 a month after France's de facto recognition of the State of Israel.³⁵ The second item is an indication in Wybot's memoirs that the Israelis had requested his help to set up their own counter-espionage service. Unable to go in person to Israel, it was Stanislas Mangin who went in his stead and helped the Israelis to set up their own service modelled on the DST. Subsequently, as a quid pro quo, the Israelis provided the French with intelligence data, particularly at the time of the war in Algeria, which had been collected by their own agents in Cairo. Wybot rendered another service to the Israelis when at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956 he arranged a secret meeting between the British SIS and their Israeli counterparts. After eight years of mutual suspicion between these two agencies, a spirit of reconciliation was in the air.³⁶

The fact that Depreux's own daughter worked for his Socialist colleague André Blumel, is further evidence of the French Socialist Party's close relationship with Zionist circles among the French Jewish elite. Depreux, in his memoirs, vaunts his help to the Zionist cause and states he would do it all over again. "I always believed that we had an immense debt towards the victims of Nazi barbarity and that we should show our solidarity, not by words, but by deeds."³⁷

A French official in the Ministry of the Interior who, more than any other, was instrumental in aiding and abetting illegal immigration was Marcel Raymond Pagès. He was a highly-placed civil servant, responsible for the Direction de la Réglementation et des Etrangers (Aliens Office), which policed the movement of foreigners through France. According to Ehud Avriel, Schmuel Ariel of the Irgun procured a meeting for them with Pagès to discuss the free transit of Jews through France. Pagès agreed that these immigrants would be permitted a short stay whilst suitable boats were acquired. Despite Avriel's assurance that the immigrants had visas for Latin America and Africa Pagès apparently made clear that he was not unaware of the true destination.

The words used by Pagès, according to Avriel, were: "Monsieur, I served with the Free French forces during the last war. I have seen the British "liberating" former

³⁵ CZA, Blumel Papers, A426/11, Letter dated 21st February 1949 to Andre Blumel.

³⁶ Bernert, 159/160.

³⁷ Depreux, 298.

French territories from Lebanon and Syria to Morocco. Believe me, I am prepared to do all I can to help.....in the direction of Latin America and Africa".³⁸

If these were truly the words actually spoken, Pagès was certainly economical with the truth when alleging that he served with the Free French Forces during the war. In fact, throughout most of the war he progressed his career within the Ministry of Labour, largely in the town of Vichy itself, where the Government offices had been moved after the occupation of Northern France.³⁹ For Pagès, like thousands of other civil servants, the installation of the Vichy Government in June 1940 did not interrupt their careers, unless of course they were dismissed because they were Jewish, Freemasons, Socialists, Communists or openly opposed the Vichy Regime.

In December 1944, as part of a policy to move former Vichy civil servants out of departments that had dealt with personnel matters during the war, he was temporarily attached at his own request to the Ministry of the Interior. As he continued to be highly regarded, this later became a permanent appointment. Pagès did not suffer the fate of thousands of former Vichy civil servants in Government, the police and the judiciary, who were summarily purged because of the nature of their activities during the war. He clearly benefited from a declaration made by the investigating "Comité de la Libération" set up in the Ministry of Labour, that he had been totally opposed to the Vichy regime and was a renowned supporter of General de Gaulle since June 1940. He was also credited with having helped various resistance organisations.⁴⁰ The suggestion that a "Renowned Gaullist" would have been allowed to continue as a civil servant under Vichy is plainly not credible, but one suspects that, in the atmosphere existing in France after the war, career advancement depended largely on one's Résistance credentials. If they did not exist in reality then they had to be invented.

In 1946 the system evolved by Pagès with the Mossad was one which at all times would satisfy the French taste for bureaucratic efficiency. Consequently he insisted on the submission of documents which complied with existing French regulations and which would pass scrutiny. In this way he could ensure that his Minister, Edouard Depreux, could not be held to account, if a boat, after leaving

³⁸ Avriel, 266.

³⁹ Archives Nationales, (Fontainebleau), M. Pagès, Dossier de Carrière, 19770340, Art.10. Career details from his personnel file show that Pages was born in 1896 and after service in the First World War and captivity in Germany he entered the French Administration in 1920. After a brilliant career as a high-flying civil servant he retired in 1958, just when General de Gaulle was appointed Prime Minister.

French territorial waters, set sail for a destination other than that indicated on the visas originally presented by immigrants on embarkation. In addition, although his immediate superior, the head of the Sûreté Nationale, Pierre Boursicot, was aware of the cover given to the Mossad, this information was not apparently shared with the Renseignements Généraux branch, whose agents carried out the final embarkation controls at the ports.

Pagès indicated to the Mossad that where a contingent of Jews was due to cross into France from the French zone of Germany, he would only require a “collective visa” to the country of final destination to be submitted to the French authorities in Germany.⁴¹ This would comprise a list of names stamped by the Consulate of the country concerned. On the basis of this document, the Aliens Office would issue a collective transit visa, which would enable the immigrants to enter France. As a last bureaucratic act, the local Préfet responsible for the port of embarkation (either the Bouches-du-Rhône or Hérault departments) would issue an exit visa for the contingent, stamping the document “As authorised by the Ministry of the Interior on...”.

The whole administrative process was totally dependent on the availability of an apparently authentic collective visa, delivered by the Consulate of the country of ultimate destination. Once this was obtained by the Mossad, the rest of the process presented no obstacles. As to how this was achieved, one can only surmise that the financial resources available to the Mossad were sufficient to convince a local consul in Marseilles to act in a manner of which his own government might disapprove. Visas from countries as varied as Venezuela, Columbia, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Cuba were the most popular. Given that, at least on the surface, French regulations were respected, the actual embarkation process could be carried out by the Mossad in daylight hours without any further subterfuge or fear of preventative measures. However the reality that these boats were being systematically intercepted near the Palestinian coast, eventually led to official protests by the British Embassy and confrontations between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bidault and the pro-Zionist ministers, Depreux and Moch. (see 5.3)

⁴⁰ Archives Nationales, (Fontainebleau), M. Pagès, Dossier de Carrière, 19770340, Art.10.

⁴¹ Avriel, 266.

An apocryphal story concerning Pagès is told by L'Abbé Glasberg. When, on one occasion, two thousand DPs were due to enter France without proper transit visas, Pagès suggested a scenario to the Mossad which was to prove successful: "Arrange for them to cross the French Frontier on Sunday during the lunch hour. Tell the officer in charge to telephone me at home. Here is my telephone number.. I will pretend to be a little drunk and I will say something to him like 'What do you want me to do with 2,000 Jews? Leave me alone, do as you will, let them in'." ⁴² In the case of the 4,500 passengers for the President Warfield in July 1947, the frontier crossing presented certain difficulties because of the sheer numbers of those involved. Pages arranged that for each convoy arriving at the French frontier the police would telephone the Ministry of the Interior for instructions. Glasberg, who had been specially allocated an office in the Ministry was, on Pagès's instructions, automatically passed these calls by the switchboard so that he could give the necessary instructions and clear the convoy for transit through France. ⁴³

Notwithstanding these amusing, if somewhat suspect, anecdotes which are intended to reflect the close and illicit cooperation between Pagès and Glasberg, Pagès would not tolerate uncontrolled and illegal entry into France. He had warned the Jewish organisations in October 1946 that measures would be taken to systematically send Jews, who crossed the frontier illegally, back to the French Zone. ⁴⁴

That Pagès was regularly informed that Jews were leaving France with fraudulent visas is clear from his exchange of correspondence with the Préfet of the Bouches-du-Rhône who was responsible for the Marseilles area. Pagès's response to the Préfet's cry of alarm is remarkable for its air of feigned ignorance

In your letter no 916 of 23rd November you indicated to me that Jews are arriving in France with regular transit visas which, according to you, had been delivered in the majority of cases on the basis of fraudulent visas for countries, which claim not to have been consulted.

I would be obliged if you would indicate to me the nature of this information and the basis on which you found your conclusions. ⁴⁵

⁴² David Lazard, *L'Opinion Française et la Naissance de l'Etat d'Israël 1945-1949* (Paris, 1972), 100.

⁴³ Lucien Lazare, *L'Abbé Glasberg*, 92.

⁴⁴ Archives Nationales, F7/16088, Minutes of a conference with 15 Jewish organisations, 18.10.46.

⁴⁵ Archives Départementales des BDR, 148W185 Memo from Direction de la Réglementation et des Etrangers to Mr. le Préfet des BDR, 23.11.46.

The report on which the Préfet had based his conclusions originated from the RG Agency. In addition to their reference about the visas, it also complained about the lack of a special system which would ensure that refugees entering France effectively also left and did not remain unlawfully.⁴⁶ On the face of it Pagès always managed to keep his own officials from enquiring too deeply into such questions which, if pursued, would have severely embarrassed his Ministry and ultimately the operations of the Mossad.

Apart from these anecdotes and Pagès's quizzical reaction to the occasional report from police officials, there was no direct corroborative evidence of his involvement in illegal immigration. Nevertheless there is some circumstantial yet compelling evidence provided by a number of memoranda prepared within the Ministry itself. If nothing else, they are indicative of a sympathetic approach to the question of the transit of Jewish immigrants through France en route to, as they clearly knew, Palestine. The first dated September 1946 and addressed to the Minister of the Interior, states

I believe I should set out for the record an area in which you adopt a humane approach... This refers to the welcome into France of foreign Jews in transit, who are presently fleeing central and eastern Europe. Their welcome into France is necessary for the following reasons:

- a.Reasons of Humanity: Because we are dealing with people who are victims of oppression
- b.Political reasons: Our attitude should evoke the high regard of world Jewish circles, whose presence, we know, is considerable in certain foreign countries
- c. Finally, practical reasons: It is only at the cost of adopting a friendly approach that we will be able to control efficiently a population movement, which had we opposed it, would have adopted covert means, leading to substantial problems for us.⁴⁷

Clearly the writer was as concerned with the promotion of French interests as with humanitarian considerations. Nevertheless it does indicate that the French were keen to facilitate the smooth transit of the immigrants towards the ports in the south of the country. Taking the most sceptical view, one could characterise this as a method of ensuring that the Jewish population of France was not unduly increased by refugees

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Memo From Service Departmental des RG à Mr. le Préfet des BDR, 26.10.46.

overstaying their welcome. On the other hand it is also quite clear, from a study carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that a controlled rise in the number of immigrants staying in France was in the French national interest. The possibility of convincing German prisoners of war to remain in France or the entry of Germans expelled from Eastern Europe, despite the expected resentment of the French populace, was put forward as a considered short-term solution. If such a controversial possibility could be envisaged then surely a small rise in the Jewish population, could hardly have been regarded as a problem.⁴⁸

Another memorandum issued in 1950, after the creation of the State of Israel, is more significant. Basically it refers to an anomalous situation created by Ministry departments working with both the Israeli Embassy and the Jewish Agency. However the comments are very revealing as to the real nature of the relationships with the Zionists in the 1945-1948 period. The writer states

As you know the Direction de la Reglementation took over in 1946 the important problem of the Jewish DPs and refugees who wished to transit through France to sail to a country where they would be welcomed... Many Jewish associations in France dealt with this problem, among them the Jewish Agency for Palestine. As the State of Israel did not exist at the time, given the political ramifications of this affair, discreet as opposed to official contacts were maintained between the interior ministry and the interested parties. A substantial number of Jews from around the world were thus able to get to Palestine and contribute to the State of Israel. The services rendered in kind by our country, albeit little known in France, were considerable. Those involved in the French administration have continued, even after our recognition of the State of Israel, to work as we did in the semi-clandestine period, by staying in contact with the various Jewish entities...⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Archives Nationales F7/16108 Affaires Diverses. To Ministre de l'Intérieur from sous-direction des Etrangers et des Passeports, 23.9.46.

⁴⁸ Archives Nationales, F1a /4742, Renseignements Généraux. Study on France's demographic problem presented to Minister of the Interior for discussion at Cabinet by Raymond Bousquet of the MAE 15.10.46. This study underlined that France had an ageing population and that immigrants between the ages of 26 and 35 would be welcome. Indeed a figure of 3 million immigrants over five years was suggested as desirable if the French birth rate itself did not increase substantially over that of the pre-war years. Even then this would only maintain the population at the existing level. The alternative was a French population of only 32 million, insufficient to provide a large work force to bring about economic recovery and the reconstruction effort required (1.8 million houses were destroyed during the war).

⁴⁹ Archives Nationales, F7/15589 Transit Israélites en provenance d'Allemagne et d'Europe Centrale. To Directeur de la Reglementation et Etrangers from sous-direction des Etrangers et des Passeports, 20.10.50. Note: Author's underlining is for emphasis.

Given the context of the times, there can be little doubt that “political ramifications” referred to British pressure on the French Government, that “interested parties” would have included the Mossad and that “services rendered” could only refer to illegal immigration. To that extent the memorandum contains the most implicit indicator of the Ministry of the Interior’s complicity in Aliyah Bet.

In another report, also written in 1950, the “Renseignements Généraux” reflected on aspects of illegal immigration. The following extract clearly recognises the clandestine nature of the embarkations

France, traditional land of asylum, found itself on one of the principal routes towards Palestine. That is why the Zionist leaders approached the government to ask for a right of passage, which it knew, given the humanitarian policy always followed by our government, would not be refused. It is also worth pointing out that the geographical location of the port of Marseilles lent itself to departures to Palestine, particularly at the beginning of the emigration, when there were a number of clandestine embarkations. Also the social climate which existed in France [at the time] permitted the Jewish leadership to engage in an important organisational effort, both as concerned departures as well as the setting up of the necessary transit points.⁵⁰

Some years later, in 1958, another report prepared by Renseignements Généraux, on Israel and Zionism stated that France had been favourably disposed to and had aided the immigration process as early as 1946, when it was still in its illegal phase.⁵¹

These revelations put a different light on assurances given by the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the immigrants’ visas etc. were always in order. Apart from the aid provided by these departments of the Ministry of the Interior it is more than probable that many civil servants and minor officials together with policemen, port employees, dockers and shipping agents facilitated the process. In addition frontier guards, customs officers and station masters were clearly aware of the special immigrant trains that crossed France towards the southern ports.

As to the preparation of the boats, which had to be fitted with hundreds of bunks, radio transmitters and provisions for the journey to Palestine, others in the French ports would have been in the know.⁵² In March 1947, the Director of information of the Jewish Agency discreetly alluded to this help by stating that no

⁵⁰ Archives Nationales, F7/15589 Direction des Renseignements Généraux, section frontière, le mouvement de Transmigration des Israélites : la question Israélienne, 1950.

⁵¹ Archives Nationales, F7/16107, RG report entitled « Israël et le Sionisme », 17.6.58.

other government in Europe was doing as much for the Jews as that under the Premiership of Ramadier. He reported that only in the last few months 20,000 Polish Jews had been allowed into France. There was in France, he stated, concern for the Yishuv's problems. This extended to the question of immigration to Palestine. They had received as much help from non-Jewish as well as Jewish sources. All this underlined the humanitarian attitude of the French Republic towards the Jewish survivors.⁵³

A further appreciation of the extent of the aid afforded by the French to illegal immigration are the impressions retained by Yigal Allon, head of the Palmach, on a visit of inspection to France in 1947. Allon stated

We moved around France as if we found ourselves carrying out the lawful activities of the Haganah. The French authorities treated us like allies. Our boats in the ports of Marseilles and surroundings, were repaired, prepared for sailing, whilst Jewish soldiers wearing British uniforms transported in "borrowed" military vehicles the survivors of the camps. Solidarity reigned: the dockers in the ports, the restaurant owners, the lawyers who dealt with our legal requirements, everybody put themselves out to help us. We were surrounded by love, by human kindness.⁵⁴

5.3 Inter-ministerial conflicts caused by British diplomatic pressure.

There can be little doubt that the major player on the British side in the campaign against illegal immigration was the Foreign Office and that without the formidable Ernest Bevin at its head, its determination might have flagged on occasions. Bevin was particularly incensed by the attitude of the French Government, which he considered was less than grateful for British war-time support. That, during 1946, they remained quiescent in the face of the illicit traffic through their ports appeared an unfriendly act at best.

Starting in 1947 the Foreign Office launched a campaign of mounting pressure on the French Government to bring illegal immigration from its ports to an end. It was aware that the French were very keen to obtain British support in their demands for German labour to be made available from the British zone and that this could be used as a form of leverage. Failing that, the Foreign Office was not averse to

⁵² Lazard, 96.

⁵³ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, Carton 72, Talk by M. I. Klinow, Director of Information at the Jewish Agency, Radio Jerusalem, March 1947.

⁵⁴ Nicault, 220.

causing the French some difficulties with the Arab countries over their North African possessions.

The diplomatic pressure, applied for the most part by the British Ambassador, Duff Cooper, was at its most acute on Georges Bidault, whose MRP faction in the coalition Government was in a minority. Believing that France's interest lay in cooperating with the British in economic and foreign policy matters, Bidault strove to convince the two most influential Socialist ministers to resolve the illegal immigration issue so that it did not interfere with his own agenda.

Both Edouard Depreux, the Interior Minister with his control over the police and Jules Moch, The Minister of Public Works and Transport, with his control over the French maritime ports, were in prime positions to give a helping hand to Aliyah Bet and to resolve any difficulties which the Mossad could encounter with French officialdom. All they asked was a measure of discretion by the Mossad so as to avoid embarrassment with their non-Socialist colleagues in the coalition government.

The available documentation analysed below reveals how difficult was Bidault's task to counteract their influence and how the subject of illegal immigration created such tensions between his Ministry and those of the Interior and Public Works and Transport.

The first real signs of protest from the British Embassy in France came with the interception of the *Asya*, the first ship to leave France (See chapter 6.1). Following its interception off the coast of Palestine on 27th March 1946, Sir Alan Cunningham, the High Commissioner in Palestine, requested that urgent representations be made to the French Government "to persuade them to take steps to stop this traffic from French ports."⁵⁵ This was taken up by Duff Cooper, who duly wrote to the MAE drawing attention to the British government's concerns about illegal immigration from French ports which, he argued pointedly, caused great resentment in the Arab States of the Middle East.⁵⁶ This was a none too subtle way of telling the French that they were risking trouble in their North African possessions.

In a separate memorandum Duff Cooper also raised the question of illegal immigrants who had tried to hide among legal immigrants on French liners that

⁵⁵ TNA, CO 537/1802, From Cunningham to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11.4.46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Aide Memoire from Paris Embassy to MAE, 10.5.46 (Not including separate memorandum).

regularly called at Haifa. He mentioned the SS Champolion as a case in point where among 900 immigrants 100 were found without Entry Certificates. The memorandum stated quite categorically that investigations had shown that illegal immigration was run from the headquarters of a Jewish organisation situated somewhere in Paris. However it admitted ignorance of the individuals involved and the exact location of the headquarters. On a separate tack, it was suggested that the Jewish Agency's Paris branch, run by Ruth Kluger, was also implicated in illegal immigration.⁵⁷

A week later the Embassy wrote again to the MAE, pointing out that a suspect boat, carrying the Honduran flag, was preparing to leave Marseilles with yet another load of illegal immigrants.⁵⁸ In response the MAE speedily confirmed that it had asked the Ministry of the Interior to take the necessary steps to put an end to the irregularities at the ports.⁵⁹ Confronted with these claims Pagès, at the Ministry of the Interior, launched a formal investigation. His deputy later reported back to the MAE that all administrative procedures in relation to the boats listed had been correctly carried out by the police and customs officials at the ports, and that therefore no blame could be attached to them.⁶⁰

The problem of lack of adequate controls, from the British point of view, was further exacerbated by the existence of an arrangement between the French Government and the Conseil Interoeuvres d'Aide aux Immigrants et Transitaires Juifs (CIATJ), which represented French Jewish organisations. Under this arrangement, which came into force in August 1946, France permitted, at any one time, the temporary residence in its territory of some 8000 Jewish refugees pending a decision as to their ultimate destination. It was left to the CIATJ to procure the necessary visas from those countries prepared to take them.

The quota of 8,000 allowed up to 7,000 refugees to travel on collective transit visas and for up to 1,000 refugees to travel on individual visas.⁶¹ To the chagrin of the British, this enabled the entry into France of refugees without the need to produce a visa for a country of ultimate destination and therefore opened up the possibility of

⁵⁷ MAE Archives, Immigration, File 376, Aide Mémoire from Paris Embassy to MAE, 10.5.46. (including separate memorandum).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, British Embassy to MAE, 17.5.46. An annotation indicated that the contents of this letter were telephoned urgently to Marcel Pagès at the Ministry of the Interior.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Direction d'Afrique-Levant to British Embassy, 23.5.46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter from Bernard, sous-directeur du Service Etranger et des Passeports to Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 11.7.46.

leaving France without such a visa or even a false one. Also as refugees left French ports, the quota was automatically renewed up to its full level.

There was also another category of refugees and these, having obtained a visa for a country of ultimate destination outside of France, were automatically provided with a transit visa through France by the nearest French consulate. However as this also opened up the possibility of the use of false visas, the MAE now insisted that the consuls did not issue transit visas without prior authorisation from Paris. This new stipulation was provoked by the case of the *San Dimitrio* which, in October 1946, had embarked in La Ciotat 1,200 illegal immigrants in possession of false visas to Ethiopia. The ship, now renamed the *Latrun*, was intercepted off the Palestinian coast on 30th October.

The British Embassy recognised how sensitive the French Government was to the issue of Jewish refugees, as it did not wish to offend Jewish public opinion nor appear in its policies to be anti-Zionist. Also there was an awareness that the French press was largely sympathetic as was the majority of the Government to the Zionist cause. Thus, in the Embassy's view, if Jewish refugees could be prevented from entering France in the first place, this would be the preferred solution to the problem. However once they were in France the interest of the French government was in moving them on as quickly as possible and thus there was no certainty that undertakings given to the British Government, regarding the application of effective controls would be fulfilled.⁶²

The origins of the agreement with the Jewish organisations can be linked to the initiative of a former Prime Minister, Félix Gouin (26.1.46 to 12.6.46), who responded to an appeal by the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Isaac Herzog, to provide a safe route through France to safer havens for those Jews wishing to leave Poland.⁶³ Initially he received approval to bring 5,000 people into France. Subsequently the FSJF received a promise of 3,000 visas.⁶⁴ These discussions took place even before the incident at Kielce on 4th July 1946, when some 42 Jews were massacred by a Polish mob. This

⁶¹ TNA, FO 371/61750 and FO 371/61800, January, 1947.

⁶² TNA, CO 537/1801, British Embassy Paris to British Consul-General in Marseilles, 27.11.46. This detailed letter was in response to one from S.E.Kay, the Consul, who was advocating a tightening, by the Ministry of the Interior, of the entry of Jewish Refugees into France.

⁶³ Archives Nationales, F7/16088, Memo from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to French Ambassador in Warsaw, 26.8.46.

⁶⁴ Archives of the AJJDC, Report on immigration from Poland to France, 25.10.46.

tragic incident enabled the Bricha, the Jewish rescue organisation, to obtain from the Polish Government permission for Jews to leave Poland without exit permits or visas and to cross into Czechoslovakia.⁶⁵ There followed a major exodus of some 90,000 Jews towards the American Zones in Austria and Germany.⁶⁶ The response of the Americans was to seek an outlet for this increasing burden on their resources, by quietly facilitating the onward movement of the refugees into Italy and France.⁶⁷

To the annoyance of the French authorities, American military trains full of DPs, organised by UNRRA and the Joint, managed to leave the American Zone in Germany and transit quite freely through the French Zone and into France. Once there the DPs were taken to camps in the south prior to embarkation for Palestine.⁶⁸ This practice, which implicitly pointed to American collusion in illegal immigration, was an abuse of an agreement signed by the allies in August 1944, whereby the American forces were permitted the unencumbered transit through France of men and supplies.⁶⁹ Eventually the army commander in the French Zone, General Koenig managed to interrupt this traffic. He demanded from the Americans proper timetables and details of the composition of the sealed trains.⁷⁰

The creation of the CIATJ was made necessary by the deluge of visa requests emanating from seventeen different Jewish organisations. The French Government and the Joint prevailed on Marc Jarblum to centralise the demands through one government-approved Agency and this was finally agreed after long negotiations.⁷¹ Given France's professed regard for the humanitarian aspects of the problem, the details for this arrangement were agreed without difficulty between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. The principal stipulation of the MAE

⁶⁵ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 176.

⁶⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 15th and 19th August 1946.

⁶⁷ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 260.

⁶⁸ Archives Nationales, F7/16088 letter to Minister for Foreign Affairs from P. Boursicot, Director of the Sûreté Nationale, 18.9.46, and also Report by Renseignements Généraux in 1950, F7/15589.

⁶⁹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124. Note for Léon Blum, 22.1.47.

⁷⁰ Archives Nationales, F7/16089, Memo to Minister of the Interior from Direction de la Réglementation Intérieure, 22.4.47.

⁷¹ Archives of the AJJDC, Report from Paris office to New York headquarters of the Joint, 25.10.46: The seventeen Jewish organisations were: Agudas Israel, Aliyat Hanoar, Anciens Combattants Polonais Juifs, Assistance aux Déportés et Réfugiés, Association des Juifs Polonais, Cojasor, Comité Hébreu de Libération Nationale, Fédération des Sociétés Juives de France, Foyer Ouvrier Juif (Poalei Zion), Hashomer Hatsair, Jewish Agency, Office Palestinien, Organisations des Juifs Polonais, Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'entraide (UJRE) and World Jewish Congress. The report also indicated that the CIATJ was to be located in the premises of the FSJF.

was that during their stay in France, the refugees would acquire entry visas to a country of ultimate destination, thus ensuring that their stay would only be temporary. The administrative work involved in preparing applications for visas was delegated to Claire Vaydat's welfare agency the "Assistance aux Déportés et Réfugiés", an offshoot of the FSJF, which then had direct access to the Ministries involved.⁷²

Having no jurisdiction over the movements of foreigners within France, the MAE was totally reliant on the efficiency of officials of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport to ensure that the refugees did indeed leave France after complying with all the formalities. As events were to show, the MAE only belatedly and because of British Intelligence information, realised that it was being duped both by Depreux's and Moch's officials and that the refugees were part of the illegal immigration campaign. To make amends to the British and in an attempt to ensure proper coordination with the other occupying power in Germany directly involved, namely the Americans, the MAE proposed a tripartite conference in Paris, to review controls over refugees entering France. This was held on 11th January 1947 in the Salon de l'Horloge at the Quai d'Orsay and chaired by Raymond Bousquet, Director General of the Direction des Conventions Administratives et Sociales at the Ministry. The British delegation was represented by Ashley Clarke, Minister at the Paris Embassy whilst the Americans were represented by Gerald Drew, the First Secretary at their embassy. The subjects discussed were the need to unify DP's identification papers and the struggle against illegal emigration out of Germany.⁷³

Despite initial American misgivings it was agreed that, as a matter of principle, all persons leaving the zones of occupation in Germany should have individual travel documents and exit permits. In addition, exit permits could only be granted once a visa had been obtained to the country of ultimate destination.⁷⁴ In later bilateral meetings with representatives of the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior, however, it became clear to the British that the French would not check the validity of visas for the ultimate destination. This was crucial as these visas were generally obtained by the Mossad from corrupt consular officials or were forged by Polonski's people in

⁷² Archives Nationales, F7 16088, internal memo to Minister of the Interior from Direction de la Réglementation, 7.8.46.

⁷³ Archives Nationales, RG report, 15.1.47.

laboratories close to or within the transit camps.⁷⁵ The false visas were created purely to satisfy French bureaucracy and as a cover for the immigrants' true destination.

The first real attempt to force the Ministry of the Interior to take the issue of illegal immigration seriously, appears to have been launched by Philippe Perier, one of Bousquet's officials who was in regular contact with the British Embassy. He appears to have twice communicated with Edouard Depreux on the subject. In a first letter on 27th December 1946, ostensibly written on behalf of Léon Blum, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the time, he informed Depreux of action he had taken in relation to one thousand Jewish immigrants from Czechoslovakia, due to arrive in France in transit to board the SS Archangelos to the Dominican Republic. Apparently he had been informed by the British Embassy in Paris that consultations with the Government at Santo Domingo had indicated that they did not wish to accept these immigrants on their territory. Accordingly he had instructed his representative in Prague to refuse any transit visa to these immigrants.⁷⁶

In an apparent second communication to Depreux he requested that all immigrant visas for Jews be checked by the MAE with the embassy of the country of ultimate destination, before embarkation took place. Depreux, having checked with Léon Blum that he had not authorised Perier's original initiative, responded a few days later to what must have been Perier's second communication. He pointed out that as departmental Prefets were already only allowing the exit of Jewish emigrants (on collective lists) on presentation of visas for countries of ultimate destination, this was already stretching the law. Normally any foreigner leaving France, although obliged to have an exit visa, did not have to submit to this additional procedure. In an attempt to deflect Perier from pursuing his original demand any further, Depreux ended: "To sum up, whilst appreciating the purpose of the British request, I believe that the proposed procedure is too heavy and too complicated to be efficient and could only damage our interests."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ TNA, FO 371/61750, January 1947.

⁷⁵ Hadari, *Hamossad*, 12.

⁷⁶ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2, Letter from Perier to Depreux, 27.12.46.

⁷⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Letter from Depreux to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 31.12.46.

Two weeks later in a conversation between Ernest Bevin and Massigli, the French Ambassador in London, the subject of illegal immigration was raised. The conversation took place at a reception in London for Léon Blum who, at the time was still leading the caretaker Government. Bevin informed Massigli, out of the earshot of Blum, that, according to intelligence reports, terrorist actions in Palestine were largely organised by extremist Jews in Paris. In effect, he contended, Jewish terrorists were being allowed to leave French ports on illegal ships. He therefore asked Massigli to seek the French Government's assistance to prevent this traffic. When informed of this conversation, Blum treated this particular assertion with a certain amount of scepticism, although he acknowledged that illegal immigration was certainly being organised in Paris.⁷⁸

A day or so after his return to Paris, Blum dealt more formally with the problem created by Perier. Having indicated that he had not had advance sight of Perier's letter, he instructed that Depreux be informed that "it is not in order for us to verify the authenticity of entry visas to [foreign] countries which are submitted to us".⁷⁹ This however was not the end of the matter, for Léon Blum's Premiership came to an end on 22nd January 1947 and the new Prime Minister, Paul Ramadier, restored Bidault to the MAE. Seizing the opportunity, once again, to expose the lack of controls in respect of illegal immigration activities, Raymond Bousquet, Perier's immediate superior, vented his department's frustration to Bidault in the following terms

In any event the French authorities have not applied any control to ensure that the entry visas to the country of ultimate destination are valid. Furthermore neither the police nor the maritime authorities exercise any control over the departure of ships containing immigrants, which leave our Mediterranean ports.

Consequently a clandestine immigration exists through France, particularly as a result of the arrival of American Military trains containing Jews who possess neither travel documents nor exit visas from Germany. A number of ships (San Dimitrio, Merica) have since October departed from French ports with 2,000 immigrants carrying false visas to Ethiopia and Cuba. There is no doubt that they were on their way to Palestine. It is

⁷⁸ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Note from Massigli to Chauvel, General Secretary of the MAE, 16.1.47.

⁷⁹ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2, Blum's letter of instruction to his Chef de Cabinet, 21.1.47.

not unlikely that among the immigrants terrorists have infiltrated. In order to satisfy Mr. Bevin's request, my department has made the following proposals:

- a. Verification of visas with foreign consulates, to ensure their validity.
- b. A very strict control of visas at the port of exit by the police and maritime authorities.⁸⁰

This memorandum illustrates how well aware the senior officials of the MAE had become of the true destination of immigrants who had transited across France, despite the Ministry of Interior's protestations to the contrary, and they now insisted on stringent measures to bring the traffic to Palestine to a stop. But they had yet to overcome the entrenched position of both Depreux and Moch who, as long as possible, fought a rearguard action to preserve the Mossad's area of manoeuvrability on French soil.

A subsequent initiative by the MAE to intervene in an area of administrative responsibility, which he considered his own, served to awaken the ire of Jules Moch. He took exception to Perier this time writing on behalf of Bidault to the Secretary General of the Merchant Navy in which he tried to dictate control procedures to be instituted at the ports.⁸¹ These, in Moch's view, would have "international repercussions". This response launched an exchange of correspondence which, seemingly, exposed a measure of exasperation on both sides.

3rd February 1947 Moch to Bidault

In your letter to the Secretary of the Merchant Navy you asked him to prevent foreign ships from sailing from French ports if they carried illegal immigrants to Palestine. You believe that this would cause problems in Franco-British relations.

It would be a very sensitive matter to hold foreign owned ships. As a Minister, I can only intervene if a foreign vessel appears to be in breach of international law for merchant shipping. If it were judged desirable to arrest shipping on political grounds, I would not be able to take part in such an operation in my capacity as Minister of Public Works and Transport... [In future] I am interested in receiving details of every action that you have proposed in the matter of preventing ships sailing from, or about to sail from French ports.⁸²

⁸⁰ MAE Archives, Immigration, file 376, memo from Bousquet to Bidault, 31.1.47.

⁸¹ Kennet, 289.

⁸² Archives Nationales, Fonds Jules Moch, 484AP13, Fonctions Ministérielles.

Bidault's reply, whilst polite in its terms, did not hide his dismay at Moch's unhelpful attitude

The first approaches by my officials to yours were motivated by the numerous complaints from the British Embassy in Paris and by the personal appeal of Mr. Bevin to Mr. Massigli [French Ambassador in London]. Mr. Bevin made note of the spirit of tolerance with which the French authorities apparently treated Jewish terrorists who were travelling illegally to Palestine. It therefore appeared to my officials necessary to provide our Ambassador with the means to show the British authorities that their claim against the French authorities was without foundation. Despite the indications in your letter, I maintain that your department does possess two effective means of control.

Bidault then suggested (a) informing the British authorities of suspect shipping in French ports and (b) that the port captain should obtain details, via the pilot, of the true destination of a suspect ship. His view was that where illegal immigration was suspected, the government under whose flag the ship was sailing, was unlikely to protest the French action, where a journey was not in accordance with the ship's manifest. Bidault went on to say : "The French Government would be well within its rights to exercise these controls, given that the illegal departure of Jews can only interfere with the regular movement of immigrant Jews with valid visas..."⁸³

Moch's reply on 28th February was clearly intended to block any further interference by Bidault's officials. In a clear reference to their war time activities in the Resistance, Moch reproached Bidault for suggesting that illegal immigrants could be terrorists, when only a few years previously "you as well as I, were branded 'terrorists' by the authorities then in power in France". He went on to decry the use of pilots as police spies to obtain information from ships' masters as to their ultimate destination which would then be passed on to a foreign power. Neither was he prepared to impose this task on the captains of the ports.

Moch closed by inviting Bidault to raise the matter in Cabinet, but warned him that he would defend his position, namely that men under his control would only carry out their professional duties but not act as policemen.⁸⁴

⁸³ MAE Archives, Cabinet du Ministre, Sous-série G. Bidault. Dossier Afrique/ Levant no.156, 22.2.47.

⁸⁴ Archives Nationales, Fonds Jules Moch 484AP13, 28.2.47.

Outside government, but nevertheless an influential voice with Socialist ministers, André Blumel intervened directly with Paul Ramadier on 13th March 1947. His personal status within the Socialist Party enabled him to address Ramadier with a familiarity not available to others. He insisted that Léon Blum's former directive of 21st January 1947 on the subject of immigrants' visas should not again be circumvented by the MAE. In other words, no investigation was to be made of the legitimacy or otherwise of visas issued by foreign countries in the possession of immigrants transiting through France. Unless Ramadier had changed the policy, he would be grateful if the civil servants in the Ministry of Foreign affairs were reminded, as a matter of urgency, of their duty to apply Government directives.⁸⁵ This exceptional letter indicates that the Mossad was anxious to avoid too close an inspection of the visas it supplied to illegal immigrants and Blumel was the ideal man to intercede on their behalf.

The apparently rancorous exchange of correspondence between Bidault and Moch is treated with some light-hearted scepticism by Jules Moch in his memoirs. In effect he seems to imply that the whole business was a charade by Bidault, intended to impress others (One would assume: either Bidault's pro-Arab officials in the Quai d'Orsay or indeed even the British Ambassador).

28.2.47. I exchange memos and telephone calls with Bidault, under pressure from British diplomats, but at heart in agreement with me. He asks me (but without really meaning it) that I inform him of the real destination of boats leaving our Mediterranean ports in order to help (or appear to help) the British to block the clandestine landings in Palestine. I refuse. The destination of a boat, for me, is that indicated by its Master. Bidault is, I am certain, delighted with my reply.⁸⁶

This apparent suggestion in Moch's memoirs that Bidault, in reality, had a laid-back attitude towards illegal immigration and British diplomatic pressure, could possibly be dismissed as an attempt to rehabilitate Bidault after his political demise over the Algerian independence issue. Certainly Moch's high regard for Bidault is reflected in the genuine feelings of warmth and sympathy that emerge from a number

⁸⁵ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2, 15.3.47.

⁸⁶ Moch, 269.

of private letters addressed to Bidault by both Jules Moch and his wife between 1949 and 1972.⁸⁷

Again, as we will see later, when analysing the Altalena Affaire, Moch deliberately characterises Bidault as a “true friend of Israel.” This view of Bidault as a closet Zionist is supported by his biographer. He characterises Bidault’s prudent official approach to all matters concerned with Palestine, whether it be on illegal immigration or later on the UN vote on partition or the recognition of the State of Israel, as hiding, in reality, “A real empathy for the Zionist endeavour.”⁸⁸

However nothing in Bidault’s papers would indicate that these were his true feelings. On the contrary, his correspondence with Depreux and Moch in early 1947 over illegal immigration tends to underline his frustration with an issue that threatened to upset the rapport he had built up with Bevin in other bilateral matters more concerned with France’s post-war economic rejuvenation. Certainly in the case of the Partition vote, it would be difficult to credit Bidault with pro-Zionist sentiments. In a telegramme to the French delegation to the United Nations in October 1947, he clearly sets out his position that the delegation should abstain in the vote.

After the disclosure of the American and Soviet positions it is unlikely that any attempt at reconciliation [between Jews and Arabs] has any chance of success. As far as we are concerned our approach, as defined before the delegation left Paris, is to dissuade the Assembly from an imposed solution and if there is no agreement between the parties concerned or any particular plan, to propose an adjournment... If therefore, as one can surmise, the Assembly moved towards a settlement rejected by the Arabs, the French delegation should normally abstain...

According to the last information received by the department this is as much as is expected from us by the Arab states. It would be useful to inform the British delegation in advance of our intentions, reminding them of the reasons why we have to take into account our many interests in countries with Arab populations.⁸⁹

René Mayer, then a senior member of the UN delegation reacted with dismay to Bidault’s approach. Beginning his letter in a somewhat obsequious tone “We have

⁸⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP186.

⁸⁸ Jacques Dalloz, *Georges Bidault: Biographie Politique* (Paris, 1992), 274.

⁸⁹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Telegramme from Bidault to French delegation in New York, 15.10.47.

often spoken together about Jewish matters. You will recognise, I believe, that I always approached the subject with the greatest discretion and objectivity that I could muster”, he went on to alert Bidault to the difficult moral and political situation of the delegation, which the telegramme had created.⁹⁰ Indeed, within a day, the telegramme provoked the resignation of at least one member of the delegation, who refuted the contention that all had already been agreed prior to its departure from Paris.⁹¹

Léon Blum added his own stinging condemnation, pointing out that nothing was worse from the point of view of France’s territories in North Africa, than to show weakness and fear in the face of pan-Arab fanaticism. From a humanitarian point of view, France would have gained nothing. Rather France would have revealed to world public opinion an injustice and a lack of courage.⁹² From within the Cabinet, Edouard Depreux passed on to Bidault Weizmann’s expressions of dismay, as transmitted to him by Marc Jarblum.⁹³ In the event, when the Partition vote came up on 29th November, Bidault finally acceded to the will of the majority of the Cabinet and ordered the delegation to vote in favour of partition.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this volte face is that where Palestine was concerned, Bidault had no strong convictions either way. Rather than enter into a political confrontation with his colleagues in the Cabinet, he preferred to take the line of least resistance, even if this dismayed his officials at the Quai d’Orsay. Later, in the matter of the Altalena Affair he again courted controversy by adopting an approach which, even in the context of the times, appeared somewhat irrational.

In all these matters a thumb-nail description of Bidault’s psychological make-up, such as given here by Georgette Elgey, only serves to enhance one’s appreciation of the complex nature of the man

Small in stature he had a very large ego. As head of the wartime resistance he saw himself equal to de Gaulle, but the humiliation he suffered at his hands only served to turn his admiration to hate. His only passion was foreign affairs and he forbade within the forums of the MRP any discussions on international questions.

⁹⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds René Mayer, 363AP36, Letter to Bidault from Mayer, 20.10.47.

⁹¹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, letter to Bidault from Olivier Lapie, 21.10.47. The terms of the letter were such an affront to Bidault that Lapie was immediately recalled to Paris “For consultations”.

⁹² Archives Nationales, Fonds Léon Blum, 570AP25, Letter to Bidault From Blum, 25.10.47.

⁹³ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, letter from Depreux to Bidault, 10.11.47.

This was his private fiefdom. Bidault preferred compromise. He was highly intellectual, secretive, cunning, irascible, inconsistent, had few friends, was not well organised and ate irregularly. His fondness for drink during his days in the Résistance had been noted by his comrades, who nevertheless paid tribute to his courage.⁹⁴

In February 1947 following an initiative launched by Léon Blum during his tenure in office, a treaty was initialled at Dunkirk between Great Britain and France. In referring to this event, intended to cement even further the existing cordial relations, the British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, told the Cabinet Committee on Defence that the British now had “the right to expect active assistance in the prevention of illegal immigration into Palestine from the French government ...”.⁹⁵ This optimistic assertion came at the end of a period when Britain had striven with all the diplomatic tact at its disposal to encourage the French Government to meet its demands, for the most part without success.

On 17th February 1947, after the failure of the London Conference on Palestine, Bevin announced that he was referring the question of the British Mandate to the UN. Faced with this new situation, the intelligence community anticipated that the Jewish Agency would make a massive effort to increase the flow of illegal immigrants to influence the outcome of any future enquiry.⁹⁶ As France was construed as being the most active area for illegal immigration at the time, the British Embassy, on instructions from London, kept up remorseless pressure on the Quai d’Orsay, to persuade the French Government to take preventative action.⁹⁷ The matter was also taken up by Bevin when he met up with Bidault at a conference in Moscow in early April 1947. After their meeting Bidault felt obliged to telegraph back to Paris urging

⁹⁴ Elgey, 174-175.

⁹⁵ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 63.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 371/61804, Report by Joint-Intelligence Sub-committee of the Ministry of Defence, 10.4.47. It was estimated that some 35,000 potential immigrants were already close to Mediterranean and Adriatic ports of departure and that at least 20 ships were already available with a further 17 being refitted for the purpose.

⁹⁷ TNA, CO 537/2276, Memorandum by Hector McNeil at the Foreign Office to Cabinet Defence Committee, 30.4.47. McNeil reported that France represented 80% of all illegal immigrant traffic in the previous six months. [As Appendix 1(a) will show, the reality was nearer to 30%. The discrepancy no doubt arises from misidentifying the ports of departure at the time]. The majority of the potential immigrants were, however, in Italy (some 22,000). McNeil felt that although strong pressure should also be exerted on its government, he also recognised that the Italians lacked the necessary military and police forces to control their long coastline.

the Cabinet to respond to British demands. Clearly though, Duff Cooper did not hold out much hope of a positive response. On 3rd April he telegraphed the Foreign Office

Mr. Bidault has telegraphed from Moscow strongly urging that French Government should meet us on matter of illegal immigration, and Mr. Teitgen who is in charge at the Quai d'Orsay was also on our side as were the MRP in general. Socialist Ministers however and particularly Mr. Depreux, Minister of the Interior and Mr. Moch, Minister of Transport were strongly pro-Jewish and had so far refused to cooperate in measures to stop this traffic.⁹⁸

This emphasis on Socialist Ministers being "pro-Jewish" (in other words pro-Zionist), as opposed to the MRP Ministers considered as favourably disposed to British entreaties, is also a popular refrain in Foreign Office correspondence. A typical example is "French left-wing politicians (and in particular the Socialists) are strongly biased in favour of the Jews..."⁹⁹

As a measure of their frustration with the French Government there were advocates within the Foreign Office of moves to embarrass the French. Generally this amounted to weakening France's position in North Africa by publicising its aid to illegal immigrants. A report by Hector MacNeill, Minister at the Foreign Office, reviewed the steps taken to pressurise the French Government to control illegal immigrants transiting through France. He expressed regret that the intransigence of Socialist members of the Government had prevented a satisfactory response despite the positive discussions between Foreign Ministers Bidault and Bevin in Moscow at the time.

MacNeill also revealed a machiavellian side to his character when he suggested that the French could be brought to order by causing them embarrassment with the Arabs. Given Arab antipathy to their presence in North Africa it would not help the French if the Arabs were to realise that the Jews were mostly arriving from French ports. The suggestion was that if the French failed to respond to unofficial warnings and continued to obstruct British demands, then suitable articles could be planted in the Arab press in London or the Middle East. He also disclosed that in the last few months the British had tried to de-register suspect boats in order to delay their

⁹⁸ TNA, CO 537/2276, Telegramme from British Embassy, Paris to Foreign Office, 3.4.47.

⁹⁹ TNA, FO 371/61750, R.G.Howe to J.Martin at the Colonial Office, 4.2.47.

departure and to facilitate their interception by the Royal Navy. He also opened up the possibility of a legal justification for interception to take place on the high seas.

As to other coercive measures, MacNeill proposed stopping the practice whereby the monthly quota of 1,500 for entry into Palestine was half filled by detainees from Cyprus, originally taken off illegal boats. He suggested that there could also be a threat, publicised in the press, that once Cyprus had reached its limit of illegal immigrants, the rest would be taken far away to the Seychelles or Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁰ There was also an implication that the French desire to recruit German workers, a move dependent on British goodwill, might not be supported as much as it might otherwise be. Finally there was also the suggestion, for the first time, that shiploads of illegal immigrants would be forced to return to France and place the French Government in a dilemma of its own making.¹⁰¹

A confrontation within the French Cabinet on the subject of illegal immigration finally took place in April 1947. Bidault, who was attending a Foreign Ministers' Council Meeting in Moscow at the time, wrote to the Prime Minister, Paul Ramadier, about a very insistent letter he had just received from Bevin on illegal immigration. As a result he wished to impart a note of caution to the cabinet at its forthcoming meeting on 9th April: "I must give you my firm opinion that the continuation of the present state of affairs, which the department [MAE] has vainly tried to remedy, will no doubt cause within a short period of time very serious complications in our relationship with England."¹⁰²

In the event the Cabinet meeting on 9th April was inconclusive as Jules Moch was absent. At a subsequent meeting on 16th April, Ramadier agreed in the absence of Edouard Depreux to carry the discussion over to a more restricted Cabinet meeting to be held on 21st April at his residence.¹⁰³ At this meeting it was left to Bidault's and Depreux's deputies, Pierre-Henri Teitgen and Marcel Pagès respectively to lead the debate. Teitgen presented a paper with a proposal that all visas for the country of ultimate destination be checked as to their validity by the MAE.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ TNA, CO 537/ 2276, 30.4.47.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 371/61806/61807 12.5.47.

¹⁰² MAE Archives, File No.30, Afrique/Levant. Telegramme From Bidault, 7.4.47.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, Telegramme from Teitgen to Bidault in Moscow, 18.4.47.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, File No.30 Afrique/Levant Letter to Bidault from Teitgen containing proposal, 16.4.47.

In response, Pagès pointed to the constant requests of the Quai d'Orsay to forbid the transit of Jewish refugees through France and accused the MAE of attempting by all means to force the Government into adopting British Government policy. In his view, this was tantamount to France being forced to apply discriminatory policies on racial grounds against the survivors of the concentration camps, which could incite unwanted reactions to the Jewish question. At the end, the meeting finally approved a compromise going some way to satisfying the MAE and by extension the British but at the same time laying down its own firm views on the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine. The terms of the response to be given to the British Embassy in Paris that day were that the French government:

- a. Refused any racial discrimination against foreigners under its control whether they be Jews or otherwise.
- b. Could not easily accept that Entry Certificates for Palestine be available only to Jews in the British zone of Germany.
- c. Will control entry visas on collective passports to show that it did not approve of illegal immigration,
- d. Demands that Jews sent back from France should be returned to the zones from whence they came.
- e. Would apply to ships leaving its ports the International Convention of 31st May 1929 in respect of the seaworthiness of boats.¹⁰⁵

Pagès in reporting to his Minister on the Cabinet meeting at which the response to the British had been discussed, indicated that only the control of the collective visas would be “a nuisance for the Jews”. He proposed to discuss with the Jewish associations the conditions under which they would be able to operate in the future. He pointed out that the control envisaged would only be to ensure that the collective visa had been granted by the consulate of the host country concerned. However he concluded ingeniously “We don’t have also to check with their governments that they really are prepared to accept the foreigners involved.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the oft-stated position of the Ministry of the Interior that they would not check the validity of collective visas under which the majority of immigrants

¹⁰⁵ Archives Nationales, F7/16089, Details provided in memo to the Minister of the Interior by Marcel Pagès on 22.4.47.

¹⁰⁶ Archives Nationales, F7/16089, Memo to Ministre de l'Intérieur from Direction de la Réglementation et des Etrangers, 22.4.47.

travelled, was somewhat upset by the Government's letter to the British Embassy of 21st April 1947 which stipulated that they would henceforth do so.

From the viewpoint of the British Embassy, there was nothing in the French Government's statement to which they could reasonably object. However behind the scenes the British tried to exploit the protracted fight to control policy on illegal immigration that was being quietly waged between the lower echelons of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Whilst the true attitudes and actions of Government Ministers, in relation to Jewish illegal immigration, could to some extent be dissimulated from their fellow cabinet colleagues within the coalition, they relied heavily on the complicity of their officials to carry them through in the most covert manner. Here we can cite as prime examples two such officials, Raymond Bousquet at the Quai d'Orsay and Marcel Pagès at the Ministry of the Interior who, according to their actions, seemed to be promoting diametrically opposed policies. Both, in their own way, used their limited authority to fulfil (what they interpreted as) the policy guidelines of their respective Ministers. Whilst Bousquet developed a particularly friendly relationship with staff at the British Embassy, Pagès worked closely and discreetly with the various Zionist organisations in Paris, including the Mossad. Each of them was careful to avoid compromising his own position by disclosing the extent of his involvement in matters outside the remit of his department.

The main bone of contention between the two Ministries was the extent to which the French Government should verify the validity of entry visas apparently accorded to Jewish immigrants by a number of foreign countries. It was on the basis of these visas that the immigrants were allowed to transit across France to the southern ports for embarkation. The British embassy contended that the majority of the visas were bogus, granted by venal consular officials and that the true destination of the immigrants was Palestine.

In advance of a meeting with Raymond Bousquet by their representative at the Paris Embassy, the Foreign Office suggested a ploy that could be used to bring the French Government to heel on the question of illegal immigration.

It has occurred to us that the French Government, in allowing Jewish illegal immigration to Palestine to go on unchecked from French ports, are

running the risk of alienating Arab opinion generally and thereby weakening their position in North Africa, which they are at present at such pains to maintain... I think it might be useful for you to have this consideration in mind during your talks with Bousquet.

We have no intention of blackmailing the French over this, but they ought to realise in their own interests the damage that their open support of illegal immigration may do throughout the Arab world.¹⁰⁷

On 28th April, Raymond Bousquet, anxious to tie the Ministry of the Interior down on the question of the verification of visas, convened a meeting with the British Ambassador at the Quai d'Orsay, to which Marcel Pagès was invited. In a subsequent report on the meeting to Pierre Boursicot, Pagès complained at the underhand way in which Bousquet only revealed the agenda once all were present. Ostensibly convened to discuss the recruitment of DPs and German workers from the British Zone to help the French economy, the third item on the agenda, to Pagès's surprise, was the "Palestinian question". In effect, Bousquet was offering the British a quid pro quo: workers from Germany for France's depleted industries against a deal to stringently verify immigration visas to other countries. In Pagès's view, Bousquet, in attempting to tie these two matters together, had committed a "fundamental error". In addition the move appeared to be in contradiction of the decisions of the Cabinet on 21st April 1947.

Pagès, in reporting to Boursicot, remarked: "One wonders, under these conditions, what Mr. Bousquet can hope to derive from these negotiations." He further asserted that there was no point in entering into discussions which were both "sterile and dangerous in respect of good Franco-British relations." He suggested that Edouard Depreux should request that the Palestinian question not be discussed, under any circumstances, until the decision of the United Nations on the matter was known and certainly not in relation to the recruitment of DPs.¹⁰⁸ Pagès, true to his own agenda, was attempting to thwart Bousquet at every turn by supplying his own Minister with ammunition to be used to counter the efforts of the MAE.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, FO 371/61804, Peter Garran at the Foreign Office to Ashley Clarke, Paris, 19.4.47.

¹⁰⁸ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2. Note from Pagès to the Director of the Sûreté Nationale, 28.4.47.

Following this first meeting with the British, Bousquet, doggedly pursuing his objective, reminded the Ministry of the Interior that the French Embassies under his control were now responsible for checking the validity of collective visas.¹⁰⁹

At a second joint meeting with British Embassy officials that he attended with Bousquet on 12th May 1947, Pagès rejected the British request that the French provide the nominal lists of those inscribed on collective visas. They would be used, the British contended, to help identify those arriving illegally in Palestine who had thrown away their papers. Bousquet, being more circumspect, promised to refer the matter to his Minister. Pagès, to pre-empt any positive decision on this matter insisted, in a report to Boursicot on the meeting, that the French Government must oppose two of the British demands, the first being to supply the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the nominal lists of those on collective passports and the second, to take action to stop the supply of diesel or coal to ships identified as suspect by the British. Pagès also reported that the British, for the first time, proposed to send back to France those illegal immigrants presently in Cyprus or those who in the future had come from France, so that they could be sent back to the Zones from whence they had come.

At the same meeting, Ashley Clarke, who led the British delegation, intimated to Bousquet and Pagès that between the British problems with illegal immigration and the French problems in its empire, a clear inter-dependence existed. He underlined that Britain had always tried to stop arms traffic from its overseas possessions to Indo-Chinese or North African rebels. Finally he intimated that a positive French attitude towards repression of illegal immigration would permit the British to satisfy France in its desire to recruit German labour in the British Zones of Austria and Germany.¹¹⁰ However, there is some doubt as to whether Britain, at the time, would have effectively supported French demands for German labour. According to Foreign Office documents seen by Kochavi, the Paris Embassy was instructed to oppose any attempt to link the two matters as, among other reasons, the British themselves had an interest in expanding the labour force in their Zones.¹¹¹ The fact that the British Zone included the coal-producing facility of the Ruhr was a source of envy for the French who

¹⁰⁹ Archives Nationales, F7/16089. Bousquet to Ministry of the Interior, 7.5.47.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Memo to Directeur Général de la Sûreté Nationale from Pagès, 17.5.47.

¹¹¹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 265.

suffered from a chronic shortage of coal through low manpower in their own mines.¹¹² It was only towards the end of 1948 that France, through an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation, was finally able to import DP labour from the French, British and American Zones of Austria and Germany.¹¹³

There can be little doubt where Pagès himself stood with regard to Jewish illegal immigration and, where he could, he attempted to counter the pro-British policies of the Quai d'Orsay. Bousquet on the other hand nurtured a cosy relationship with the British Embassy in Paris. In a memorandum to the Foreign Office it was reported that Bousquet had alluded at meetings with the Embassy to the pro-immigrant bias of the Socialist Ministers in the French Government and to the influence of the Socialist leader, Léon Blum.¹¹⁴ More likely to compromise Bousquet, however, was the fact that he had covertly agreed to supply the nominal lists of those on collective visas to the British Embassy.¹¹⁵ Unbeknown to Bousquet, this particular demand by the British Embassy had been formulated in a paper prepared by the Minister of state at the British Foreign Office back in April 1947. At the time the Minister felt that the French would resist the demand because "It is designed to produce just the evidence against them which has so far been lacking".¹¹⁶ It appears that, in Raymond Bousquet, the Foreign Office believed that they had found a dupe who would unwittingly supply them with a stick with which to beat the French Government.

Bousquet was also not averse to making suggestions to the Embassy which they could adopt as their own and not reveal the original source. Specifically, he suggested to Duff Cooper that if the British were to extend to France a significant part of the monthly quota to Palestine, this would effectively cut the ground from under the feet of Jewish bodies. He also suggested that if the British were at the same time to announce that any renewal of illegal immigration would result in the withdrawal or reduction of the monthly quota, it would make it difficult for certain elements within the

¹¹² Archives Nationales, F1a/4742, Renseignements Généraux reports Oct 1946/April 1947. The coal shortage in France reached such a critical level at the end of 1946 that Leon Blum approached Attlee for help. The response was that the British themselves faced similar manpower problems and were not able to provide supplies either from their own mines or those of Germany.

¹¹³ Archives Nationales, F7/16061. Technical agreement between the Preparatory Commission of the IRO and the French Government, signed in Paris on 5.11.48.

¹¹⁴ TNA, FO 371/61750, Paris to Foreign Office, 16.1.47.

¹¹⁵ TNA, CO 537/2378, John Coulson of British Embassy, Paris to John Beith at the Foreign Office, 20.6.47.

¹¹⁶ TNA, FO 371/61804, Minister of State to Defence Committee of Cabinet, 9.4.47.

Government, namely Socialist Ministers, to “continue to facilitate the illicit traffic”. Duff Cooper was careful to stipulate to the Foreign Office that the suggestion should come as a British initiative and that Bousquet should certainly not be quoted on this matter.¹¹⁷ However when Bousquet presented this “British proposal” to the Ministry of the Interior, he was effectively rebuffed. He later told the Embassy that despite his willingness to pursue the matter further he felt that the outcome might be to reduce such influence as his ministry still possessed with the Ministry of the Interior.¹¹⁸

Bousquet’s ultimate vindication came with the embarrassing political fall-out over the Exodus Affair in July 1947 when the Cabinet had to admit that errors had been committed at the port of departure. It had become abundantly clear, in view of the Columbian Government’s refusal to recognise the visas held by the immigrants who boarded the President Warfield, that a large-scale fraud had been perpetrated by the organisers of the boat. This incident, as the MAE was quick to point out, was one of a whole series of similar cases involving bogus visas. It had been shown that boats ostensibly sailing for countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Columbia and Ethiopia, according to the immigrants’ visas, invariably turned up off the coast of Palestine. In addition it was undeniable that the President Warfield had left port carrying three times the permitted number of passengers and was therefore in breach of the 1929 International Convention regulating ships at sea.

The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, being the Ministries responsible for the police, customs and maritime authorities, were put in the embarrassing position of having to acknowledge that their agents had consistently failed to prevent these illegalities, despite constant warnings from the MAE that they were occurring. To make amends both ministries issued new instructions in October 1947 to prevent a recurrence of the Exodus Affair. These stated specifically:

1. Suspect boats arriving on the Mediterranean coast would immediately be identified and the Ministry of the Interior informed by the Prefet of the department concerned.
2. The services of the maritime authorities would ensure that the supply of fuel and other necessities to foreign boats was strictly limited.

¹¹⁷ TNA, FO 371/61823, Duff Cooper to Foreign Office, 1.9.47.

¹¹⁸ TNA, CO 537/2386, Paris to Foreign Office, 1.9.47 and 14.9.47.

3. All visas on individual passports for those countries where visa fraud had been detected would be validated with the country concerned before exit visas were issued.¹¹⁹

Intensive enquiries in October 1947 by various police agencies into Zionist organisations attest to an apparent radical change in attitude by the Ministry of the Interior. (See chapter 6). Whatever the true purpose of this activity, the ultimate effect was to restrict the Mossad's ability to manoeuvre for fear of upsetting the authorities.

Besides Bousquet's department another of the major departments within the Quai d'Orsay was that of Afrique-Levant, which supervised its diplomatic representation in the Middle East and Africa. Whilst its anti-British sentiments often rose to the surface, this did not imply any positive attitude towards Zionism, except in so far that it served French interests. These were primarily concerned with retaining French dominance over Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the face of opposition from the Arab League and re-establishing its position in the Levant.

Such considerations dictated its reaction to a letter from René Cassin, the head of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in July 1946. Cassin challenged Bidault, then Prime Minister as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to demonstrate French Government support for Zionism by confirming that the Balfour Declaration still held validity. Recommending the avoidance of such a public statement, Afrique-Levant referred to France's delicate situation in North Africa "It is not in the interests of France to awaken antisemitic reactions nor to bring together nationalist passions among different Arab populations and by so doing facilitate the task of the Arab League". It also pointed out that a confirmation of the terms of the Balfour Declaration would represent a danger to the 475,000 Jews in North Africa.¹²⁰

In a different vein, when the British took repressive action in Palestine, the French Consulate in Jerusalem revealed to Afrique-Levant its general contempt for the Mandatory authorities

¹¹⁹ MAE Archives, Note from Direction des Conventions Administratives et Sociales, 21.10.47.

¹²⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457 AP124, Note from Direction Afrique-Levant, 13.7.46.

We can only say that they have failed to lead the country towards liberty and autonomy. The Mandates given to France at the same time over Lebanon and Syria effectively led to the establishment of a government and an administration in those countries, able to function, leaving aside the ethical quality of their leaders. The hatred with which Great Britain helped these two countries in their haste to abandon the terms of the Mandate presents a sad contrast with its obstinacy to remain in a country where everything points to its failure.¹²¹

Although not particularly in favour of a Jewish State, members of the French Consulate maintained cordial contacts with members of the Jewish Agency and were particularly interested in obtaining intelligence from them regarding any anti-French activities in Arab countries which could interfere with their hegemony in North Africa.¹²²

A report in April 1946 from General Beynet, the French commander in Beirut, recommended Moshe Shertok, head of the political department of the Jewish Agency to Georges Bidault, as a person who was keen to share the Agency's intelligence sources with the French Government. In return Shertok would seek a discreet agreement that where Zionist and French interests coincided, a common approach could be taken to resolving political problems. All the while Shertok would be conscious of France's need to maintain its neutrality on the Palestine issue, in view of the Moslem population in North Africa.¹²³ No indication was found, in the documentation, that Bidault ever took up the General's recommendation.

Much later in December 1947, taking a decidedly more anti-Zionist line, an official at Afrique-Levant bewailed the fact that France had voted in favour of partition at the UN Assembly, rather than abstaining, as the British had done

It is evident that, in Arab eyes, England is the only great power which, in this matter, had not taken sides against them. The British Government is thus able to recover in the Levant the exceptional position which General Spears's actions had created for her to our detriment.

¹²¹ MAE Archives, Administration Britannique en Palestine, File 372, Note from Hardy to MAE Direction Afrique-Levant, 5.5.47.

¹²² Hershco, 40.

¹²³ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, Carton 72, Palestine, 8.4.46.

Actions the effect of which our patient efforts over eighteen months had managed to correct.¹²⁴

It would seem that even within the Afrique-Levant department attitudes towards either the British or the Zionists were dictated more by passing sentiments than clearly defined policies.

¹²⁴ MAE Archives file 373, Carton 72, Secrétariat Général, Note pour le Ministre, 1.12.47.

CHAPTER 6 The Sea journey to Palestine

The acquisition of ships for the purpose of illegal immigration was carried out by Mossad operatives in a variety of ways. Initially small fishing boats were acquired in Greece or Italy. Later, as surplus ships previously used in wartime came onto the market, intermediaries were used to rent them. However, as their interception by the British became a regular feature, outright purchase became the only viable option, pushing financial resources to their limits. Once acquired, the ships with limited passenger space had to be fitted out with kitchens, tightly serried rows of bunks, sanitary facilities, ventilation equipment and additional life-boats if possible. This work was often done in the small ports of the Mediterranean in Italy or France depending on the attitude of the local authorities and the level of surveillance by the British Intelligence Service. Later, when larger ships were acquired in the USA, the prevailing sympathetic environment was such that fitting out could be carried out less covertly. Nevertheless, as this activity did not escape the attention of the British, some of these ships were moved to ports in Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria. Here the loading of immigrants could be carried out openly in daylight hours with the acquiescence of the local authorities, now under Communist rule. The attempts at intervention by British diplomats in the area to prevent the sailing of the ships was generally ineffectual.¹

After a few relatively small landings of immigrants on the shores of Palestine between July and October 1945 originating in Italy and Greece, the Admiralty was given the task of blockading the coast to prevent any further illegal arrivals.² Its plan, entitled "Operation Tableland", envisaged the use of the Royal Air Force to carry out reconnaissance and provide early warning of the approach of suspect boats. The Royal Navy would then take over and, with a flotilla of one cruiser, two to four destroyers and Palestinian police launches, patrol the coast and detain and inspect any suspect ship once it had entered the three mile limit. If illegal immigrants were found on board, the boats were to be brought into Haifa. Strict orders were given not to use

¹ Hadari, *Hamossad*, 20.

² See Appendix 1(a).

force beyond that which was absolutely necessary.³ In practice, when the boats were brought into harbour, application was made to the Haifa District Court for their forfeiture.⁴ If the Master and crew could be identified, which was not often the case, they were prosecuted.

The army, under the orders of the Commander in Chief, Middle East Land Forces (MELF), was also given an important role to play. Once an illegal boat docked, soldiers took over from the navy, removed the passengers and interned them until such time as a decision was taken as to their future. At the same time the military was to attempt to arrest any illegal immigrants who managed to avoid the naval patrols and secretly land on the shores of Palestine. Crucial to the satisfactory implementation of these various tasks was the intelligence information transmitted by British agents placed at the potential areas of embarkation around the Mediterranean coast. Early warning of the names and size of illegal immigrant ships with their estimated time of arrival often enabled an initial sighting to take place well before the ships reached the three mile limit.

Starting in November 1945 almost all suspect boats were systematically intercepted and boarded by the Royal Navy, following which a "Report of Proceedings" would be drawn up by the ship's commanding officer. This detailed the whole process of taking control of the illegal ship, including information as to casualties if these occurred. Once the ship was brought into Haifa further reports were prepared by the Field Security Section of the 6th Airborne Division. These invariably comprised a careful and generally objective analysis of the origins, political persuasion and a numerical breakdown of the illegal immigrants.

In a booklet published in July 1948, the Admiralty analysed the lessons learnt from the interception of the illegal immigration ships. They considered that the attitude of the immigrants underwent radical changes as the campaign failed to meet its objectives. Thus in the first six months to May 1946, immigrants reacted passively to their ship being boarded, whilst in the succeeding two months until mid-August they only reluctantly submitted. The major change came about when the British Government no longer allowed the immigrants to land in Palestine, albeit to be

³ TNA, ADM1 21103, Instructions from Office of the Flag Officer, Levant and Eastern Mediterranean, 8.10.45.

⁴ TNA, CO 537/3942, List of illegal immigrant vessels as at 6.3.48.

detained temporarily in Athlit, but were trans-shipped to Cyprus. From that moment on until December 1947, fierce resistance met all naval boarding parties. This was particularly illustrated in July 1947, in the case of the President Warfield (see Chapter 7). With heavier resistance being met, the navy increased boarding parties from 12 to 30 men and set about developing new tactics. A six-day boarding course to provide individual training in agility, hand-to-hand fighting and weapon handling was initiated in October 1946 at the Royal Marine Training Centre in Malta.⁵

It was assumed by the Admiralty that the level of resistance offered was dictated by orders received at virtually the last minute from the Haganah ashore. Although preparations on board ship had been made by the Palyam escorts, the ultimate decision was dependent on such factors as the ship's ability to escape and beach herself or the propaganda advantages to be obtained by embarrassing the British. It was left to the Palyam commanders on board to maintain discipline and deal with the boarding parties. It was a rule of the Mossad that resistance, except in a rare instance, would not include the use of fire-arms. In most cases, where they existed, they were thrown overboard together with radio transmitters and incriminating documents once interception was in the offing. Also, after the ship was boarded, members of the crew would merge with the immigrants to escape detection and consequent trial and imprisonment.⁶

6.1 Ships from France

The usual route for DPs into France was through the French Zone in the Baden-Wurtemberg area of Germany. They were brought here from the DP Camps in the adjacent American Zone where visas for the country of ultimate destination (often fraudulently acquired) were presented to French consular officials. Ultimately transit visas were issued by the Ministry of the Interior in France for presentation at the French border. Once in France the DPs were taken to the railway station in Strasbourg, Mulhouse or Colmar. Trains took them to Lyons from where they were

⁵ TNA, ADM 239/412, The Campaign against Illegal Jewish Immigration into Palestine: November 1945 to August 1947, pages 1-39.

⁶ TNA, ADM1 20789.

moved into transit camps in the Marseilles area as the last stage before boarding their ship at the coast.⁷

The process of embarking would-be immigrants to Palestine from the southern ports of France had been an intermittent feature from March 1946 to April 1948. Some 16,200 immigrants were transported in some 15 ships, the vast majority to be intercepted by the British and their passengers interned. Those ships that did manage to reach the Palestinian coast undetected by the Royal Navy were usually directed by radio to deserted beaches near Tel Aviv, Caesaria or Nahariyah in the north. The Haganah would then organise the speedy disappearance of both passengers and crew to neighbouring kibbutzim, before the British army was alerted. The crew members, often volunteers recruited in the USA, would be led by a Palyam Commander. In addition to a trained radio operator, essential for maintaining contact with both the Mossad in France and Palestine, members of the Palyam escorted each boatload so as to maintain discipline during the hazardous sea crossing. In addition selected youngsters on board were given training in how to repel the British boarding parties without causing loss of life. In a controversial directive, Yigal Allon, the head of the Palmach, had insisted that any attempt by the British to board had to be resisted for as long as possible. At the December 1946 World Zionist Congress in Basle, Allon explained

We want to fight the British in every possible way, including immigration. This struggle brings the immigrants and the Jewish community together in the fight against the British Government and by resisting at sea, we shall draw world Jewry to our side and give added force to our campaign. The struggle will expose Britain's unjust and immoral behaviour and win support for a people fighting for its life.⁸

As there were often French or American journalists aboard illegal ships, this ensured that the full propaganda effect of the struggle of the She'erit Hapletah to reach their chosen homeland would reach as wide a world audience as possible.⁹

The first illegal ship to leave France was the Asya. After being prepared in Marseilles with bunks for 700 passengers, she left La Ciotat on 16th March 1946.

⁷ Bauer, *Flight*, 280.

⁸ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 153.

⁹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 13.

Until then Greek and Italian ports had been used.¹⁰ It was decided that she would carry DPs then encamped in Belgium and so relieve the pressure there. The problem was that the agreement with the French for transit rights only applied to DPs from Germany, so a clandestine route had to be chosen. Here the knowledge of French roads acquired by Haganah operatives, involved in arms procurement (the Rekesh organisation), was put to good use. Using British army trucks a convoy including ambulances and mobile kitchens was put together. At the front in a jeep, rode a captain of the Jewish Brigade. As military convoys were a common sight at the French border no problems were encountered. On the outskirts of Marseilles, Shmariah ('Rudi') Zameret of the Mossad led the convoy to the berth of the Asya and the DPs were speedily taken on board. At sea her name was changed to the Tel Chai. On 27th March she was intercepted by the Royal Navy off the Palestine coast and escorted to Haifa. All 733 passengers were temporarily interned in Atlit.¹¹ According to MI5, the passengers, when questioned in Palestine, asserted that they were embarked under the supervision of the French police, who recorded their names and particulars at the time. None was in possession of travel documents on arrival.¹²

The next ship to leave France was the Norsyd, one of two ex-Canadian corvettes acquired by the Mossad. On board was the American reporter Isidore F. Stone who, within months of his return to the USA, published a book on his experiences.¹³ Crewed almost entirely by young American Jews, the ship left Sète on 21st June 1946. She carried 1,108 immigrants, two thirds of whom were men. Only 196 of the immigrants were aged over thirty. They included Orthodox Jews, Revisionists and left-wing pioneers from some sixteen European countries but at least half came from Poland, made up of the pioneering youth of Hashomer Hatsair (the Young Guardians) intent in living on communal settlements in Palestine.¹⁴ With them Stone established a particularly strong rapport and recorded their individual stories about how they had survived the Holocaust.

¹⁰ Zertal, « Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle », 412.

¹¹ Avriel, 268/9.

¹² TNA, FO 371/56239 Appendix C. Report on Jewish illegal immigration from Europe to Palestine, August 1946.

¹³ Isidore F. Stone, Underground to Palestine, (New York, 1978) (First edition published in 1946). Hereafter Stone.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144/150.

Earlier, in New York, Stone had obtained the Mossad's agreement to sail on one of their boats against his promise not to reveal in any future publication, names of places and individuals, which British intelligence could use to counter illegal immigration. This, to some extent, he complied with. Nevertheless his careless revelation in his book of the actual names allocated by the Mossad to three illegal immigrant boats he spent time on, would have enabled the British to piece together his movements in Italy and France without too much difficulty. In any event, the British military occupation authorities in Genoa were aware that he had attempted unsuccessfully to sail on board the Josiah Wedgwood before it escaped the clutches of the Italian police on the Italian Riviera in June 1946.¹⁵

Stone was equally indiscreet in describing the routes taken out of Poland by Jewish refugees attempting to reach Vienna via Bratislava in Slovakia and the complicity of both the Joint and UNRRA.¹⁶ In Vienna, as he quite clearly hinted, the authorities in the American zone, not least of whom was General Mark Clark, the US commander in Austria, provided every facility to the refugees for their onward journey, whether this was to DP Camps in Germany or over the border into Italy.¹⁷ By and large, Stone's vocation as a reporter got the better of him and he rushed to publish his experiences the moment he returned to the USA later in July 1946. The Mossad must have despaired at the amount of incriminating information his book revealed at a crucial stage in the illegal immigration campaign. But this may have been mitigated by his closing words in which he states: "I believe the only hope lies in filling the waters of Palestine with so many illegal boats that the pressure on the British and the conscience of the world will become unbearable. And if those ships are illegal, so was the Boston Tea Party."¹⁸

Having failed to sail on the Josiah Wedgwood from Italy, Stone's eventual journey to Palestine took place on the Haganah (formerly the Norsyd) from another port on the Mediterranean coast. Zertal, in her own book, reveals this as being Sète, a quiet fishing port to the west of Marseilles. This was particularly fortuitous as the port was in the constituency of Jules Moch. Here, not surprisingly, the officials in

¹⁵ Stone, 125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52 and 90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

the docks were most accommodating.¹⁹ Of the fifteen illegal ships to leave French ports between 1945 and 1948, five are recorded as having left from Sète.²⁰

This particular venture of the Mossad was all the more remarkable in that it involved the transfer at sea of all the immigrants on to a smaller boat for the final 100 miles of the journey to Palestine. Under very precarious conditions they were transferred on the corvette's launches to a Turkish freighter, the Akbel, at a prearranged spot. The intention was to safeguard the Norsyd from interception and its confiscation by the Royal Navy.²¹ It was, in any event, intercepted on a second journey, some weeks later, when it arrived from Yugoslavia with more illegal immigrants. However before this happened the Admiralty had already been warned "This [tactic] suggests a policy of transport by the fast and seaworthy corvettes to a point outside territorial waters where the immigrants are transferred to smaller or less valuable ships."²²

The nearly disastrous experience of the Akbel which, according to Stone was overloaded and subjected its passengers to inhumane conditions, most likely deterred the Mossad from repeating this type of operation.²³ These conditions were vividly described by Stone. The major problem was the lack of ventilation in the holds of the freighter and the fierce heat. Added to which was the lack of water and food. Also, fist fights broke out between immigrants, some of whom refused to leave the decks so that others could come up for fresh air from the holds. The Palmach escorts had great difficulty in maintaining a semblance of order. Some of the men had to be picked up bodily and carried to the hold. Compared to the already cramped conditions on the Norsyd, the 1015 immigrants had to make do with a ship half the size.²⁴ Fearing that the overloaded ship might capsize, the Palmach commander sent out an SOS. But other than being overflowed by RAF planes there was no sign of help at hand.²⁵

¹⁹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 68.

²⁰ See appendix 1(b).

²¹ Stone, 180.

²² TNA, ADM1 19856, Office of the CIC Mediterranean Station to Secretary of the Admiralty, 23.7.46.

²³ Stone, 181/191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

The Akbel was first intercepted near Cyprus some 180 miles from Palestine by the British destroyer Virago.²⁶ The Turkish captain had deliberately altered course away from the short route to Palestine. After a cursory inspection of the Akbel by an ensign and six sailors, they then rejoined their ship. It departed from the area without supplying the water and food requested by an increasingly desperate Palmach commander. Eventually when the Akbel was in sight of Haifa and had entered Palestine territorial waters, she was again boarded by sailors from the Virago, this time accompanied by Arab Palestine police.²⁷ The ship was brought into Haifa on 2nd July, under her new name the Biria. The journey from Sète had taken 10 days.²⁸ Fearing that there was bubonic plague aboard, the British moved all the passengers on to an illegal ship which had been confiscated earlier, the Smyrna (later renamed the Max Nordau) and kept them in quarantine for six days. During this period only 100 passengers were allowed to land. The rest of the passengers then staged a hunger strike, which ended once they were allowed ashore and taken to Atlit for internment.²⁹

Stone left the Akbel at an earlier stage. Dressed in his American military correspondent's uniform he simply walked off the ship and out of the port area in the company of a Palestinian Jewish doctor sent from the shore. In any event he had a properly authenticated visa for Palestine which he had obtained from a British diplomat two months earlier in Washington.³⁰ After making this eventful trip with the DPs to Palestine, Stone relates that he found himself a hero in the American Jewish community, called upon to speak regularly at their conventions. He was prevailed upon by the Zionists to persuade American Jews to make common cause with the Yishuv.³¹

In his book, Stone revealed two incidents which should have alerted the British to the extent of French complicity in illegal immigration. The first was the use of German prisoners of war to load cases full of life belts onto the Norsyd in a French port under the eyes of the port's pilot. Only the army or police could have had

²⁶ Stone, 196.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁹ Paul Silverstone, *Clandestine Immigration to Palestine 1938-1948* (New York 1999), 16. Hereafter Silverstone.

³⁰ Stone, 215.

³¹ Stone, 232.

the authority to provide POWs for this purpose and, as Stone himself commented, it must have been obvious that a boat containing a crew of only twenty-five had no need of a quantity of life belts suitable for a small passenger liner.³² Secondly the immigrants arriving by a convoy of trucks to the quay side were supervised by large numbers of police and port officials on shore as well as on the boat. Indeed these servants of the government all had the opportunity to sample the Mossad's lavish hospitality in the ship's mess during the six hours it took to load the boat with its 1,000 or so immigrants. Stone observed: "The more they ate and drank the friendlier the atmosphere became."³³

The details concerning the sailing of the Sagolem (later renamed the Yagur) from La Ciotat, a small port in the vicinity of Marseilles, have already been dealt with in Chapter 3. It will be recalled that this was the first time that immigrants were no longer interned in Atlit but were trans-shipped to Cyprus.

On 19th October another ship sailed from La Ciotat. She was called the San Dimitrio. In her case, it was the MAE that warned the British Embassy in Paris that the passengers probably included a group of 500 Jewish refugees whose collective visa had previously been declared by the Ethiopian Legation to have been fraudulently obtained. Despite appeals to the Ministry of the Interior, no attempt was made to stop the immigrants from embarking with their dubious visas. According to MI5 the ship then sailed "with the connivance of the French authorities."³⁴ On 30th October, now renamed the Latrun she was intercepted by the Royal Navy. She was leaking and listing badly owing to overloading and water in her holds. Nevertheless the boarding party was resisted strenuously by the young Polish immigrants on board and tear gas was used to subdue them. The following day her 1,279 passengers were trans-shipped in Haifa onto two liberty ships and taken to Cyprus.³⁵

Among the documents found on board the San Dimitrio were two issued by the French customs at La Ciotat permitting the departure of the ship, ostensibly for Beirut. A third document, a certificate of seaworthiness issued in Marseilles also gave the destination as Beirut and the number of passengers as over 1,200. In its report MI5 indicated that these documents were proof of "the slackness of the French

³² Stone, 133.

³³ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁴ TNA, KV 3/56, MI5 report on illegal immigration activities, 21.11.47.

port authorities in clearing a ship with an obviously excessive number of passengers.”³⁶ The departure of this ship particularly angered the British Embassy because for once they were ahead of the game and had been working in close liaison with the MAE to prevent its departure. But they had not reckoned with the devious complicity of the two Socialist-led French Ministries which effectively controlled both the police and the maritime authorities. The British Embassy reported to the Foreign Office that in their conversations with Mr. Bousquet, Director of Administrative Affairs at the MAE, he had acknowledged that the Ministry of the Interior had been at fault, but assured them that exit visas in future would only be granted after the validity of visas for countries of ultimate destination had been checked. He further confided that the present Socialist-led government under Léon Blum were not only disposed to give full weight to humanitarian considerations but were much better disposed towards Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe than the Communists in the coalition. He concluded that as long as there was a Socialist Minister of the Interior, it was to be expected that these persons would receive very benevolent treatment.³⁷

Two days later a further meeting was held with Bousquet, this time in the presence of a representative of the Ministry of the Interior. In his report, Ashley Clarke, the Chargé d’Affaires, was forced to admit to the Foreign Office that “the meeting was most unsatisfactory and the French went back on their previous position.” In effect the Ministry of the Interior was not prepared to check visas for foreign countries, thus squashing Bousquet’s previous commitment. Clarke concluded that the MAE “have been too lavish with their assurances in the past, having regard to the lack of co-operation offered by the Ministry of the Interior.”³⁸

In 1947, as if to emphasise Britain’s inability to stop the traffic to Palestine, the number of ships from French ports doubled. The first ship in the new year was the *Merica* which sailed on 17th January 1947 from Sète, carrying 656 immigrants from Poland and Czechoslovakia, ostensibly to Cuba. However the Cuban visas were not inspected by the French authorities.³⁹ The trip took 22 days through stormy seas.

³⁵ Silverstone, 19.

³⁶ TNA, KV 3/56.

³⁷ TNA, FO 371/61750 Paris to Foreign Office, 16.1.47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.1.47.

³⁹ Hadari, *HaMossad*, 58.

There was extensive overcrowding and the food was so inadequate that the ship had to drop anchor at Messina to take additional provisions on board. This attracted the attention of the Italian police and the ship made a hasty departure. As a result of storms near Crete, water penetrated the engine room and, with the failure of the mechanical pumps, had to be pumped out manually. When the ship approached the Palestinian coast, a dispute erupted with the Mossad on shore as to the choice of landing spot. Reluctantly, the beach at Tel Aviv had to be abandoned in favour of Ceasarea. In the event, interception and boarding by the British, which took place on 8th February, negated that option.⁴⁰ There was fierce resistance by the immigrants leading to one dead and three injured. The next day, under her new name of LaNegev, she was brought into Haifa with gashes in her hull where she had been rammed.⁴¹ At a later date the Mossad's man in Tel Aviv explained "We were forced to direct LaNegev to Ceasarea, because in the present situation it was impossible to land boats at the desired spot. The ship was spotted [only when] close to shore. It is clear that had there been boats on the ship and if we had been free to direct it, the chances of a successful landing would have been good."⁴²

MI5 pointed out that the French quota, which accepted the presence in France of 8,000 Jewish immigrants at any time whilst they awaited visas for a foreign destination, was open to abuse as they could all embark as illegal immigrants without any interference from the French authorities. Such, in their view, was the case with the passengers of the Merica, many of whom had arrived in Strasbourg from Czechoslovakia on 14th December 1946, under this arrangement.⁴³

On 22nd January 1947 a note was prepared for Léon Blum, both Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, detailing the use of fraudulently obtained visas in the case of the San Dimitrio and the Merica. In both instances, on the basis of information supplied by the British Embassy, the MAE had warned the Ministry of the Interior about the presence in La Ciotat of the two suspect ships. In neither case had the Ministry of the Interior mounted a surveillance operation or

⁴⁰ Hadari, HaMossad, 59.

⁴¹ Silverstone, 22.

⁴² Hadari, HaMossad, 59.

⁴³ TNA, KV 3/56.

checked the validity of the visas.⁴⁴ Also on 22nd January, the British Embassy in Paris informed the MAE that the San Miguel and the Arbil both suspect ships, had arrived in Marseilles.

The Embassy chided the French to make amends for past failings “His Majesty’s Embassy earnestly trust that all possible steps will be taken by the French authorities to prevent a repetition of the ‘San Dimitrio’ incident in connection with these two ships.”⁴⁵ To British dismay, the San Miguel sailed from Sète on 3rd February and the Abril from Port-de-Bouc on 1st March. The San Miguel carried 807 immigrants on board, mostly from Poland, Yugoslavia and Romania. They comprised 462 men, 212 women and 133 children. On being intercepted on 16th February, the passengers had to be subdued with water jets and tear gas. As the engines were sabotaged it took 14 hours for a British minesweeper to tow her into port, now under her new name of Ha’Maapil Ha’Almoni. During trans-shipment in Haifa there was no resistance and the immigrants were even smiling and singing.⁴⁶

The Abril is unique in being the only ship to have been used by the Irgun for the transport of illegal immigrants in the period from the end of the war to the creation of the State of Israel. With great fanfare, the Abril was purchased and repaired in Brooklyn by the American League for a Free Palestine. She was later named the Ben Hecht in gratitude to the playwright of the same name, who, as an ardent supporter of the Irgun, wrote “A Flag is Born” a tribute to “the fighters for Palestine.”⁴⁷ Compared to the average Mossad ship, the 599 passengers on the Abril were transported in comparative luxury. The organisational details in France had been dealt with by Schmuël Ariel, the Irgun’s European representative and Claire Vaydat, the Director of “Assistance aux Réfugiés et Déportés”, which until March 1947 worked under the umbrella of the FSJF. According to the RG the passengers were covered by three collective visas delivered by the French Consul in Munich on 18th February. The exit visa was delivered against a visa for 658 immigrants from the Bolivian Consulate General in Paris dated 1st February and the Consul’s signature

⁴⁴ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124. Note prepared by the Direction des Conventions Administratives for Mr. Léon Blum, 22.1.47. It is unlikely that Blum ever saw this note as he resigned that very day and was replaced by Paul Ramadier another Socialist.

⁴⁵ MAE Archives, Immigration, File 376, 22.1.47.

⁴⁶ Silverstone, 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

was validated by the MAE on 26th February.⁴⁸ In all respects the RG could claim that all legal requirements were fulfilled. However the boat set sail for Palestine and not Bolivia.

According to the Field Security Section in Haifa, all equipment on board was American, the engines were in perfect order, food was plentiful and sanitary arrangements were adequate. When intercepted on 8th March, the Section's commanding officer, Captain Linklater was surprised that no resistance was offered and trans-shipment also passed off peaceably. Among the passengers was Jacques Meyer of "Paris Presse", who represented 'Life Magazine'.⁴⁹

The task of the Field Security Section, stationed in the Port of Haifa, differed from that of the navy in one particular respect. They were primarily concerned with intelligence gathering in an attempt to identify the organisers involved, the manner in which immigrants were brought to the ports of embarkation, their political or religious affiliations and the terrorist element amongst them, if indeed such existed. From their reports, it is clear that their investigators were of a particularly high calibre, well versed in foreign languages including Yiddish and Hebrew (possibly using personnel from the local population). Whatever documents they could find aboard illegal ships were immediately passed to the local CID for further examination. Unfortunately only the reports of the Field Security Section from January 1947 were available at the PRO. Nevertheless they were a mine of information as to the prevailing attitudes of the military towards illegal immigrants.

In a paper prepared in March 1947 by Captain J. Linklater, entitled "Report on Jewish Propaganda concerning Immigration into Palestine" there is an attempt to debunk the notion that illegal immigrants were truly refugees worthy of world-wide sympathy. He relates that, according to a Jewish source, whilst the discipline on a ship during the voyage was good, orders were given about a day before reaching Palestine, to convert the ship into a veritable pig-sty. He comments

It has been seen, during the arrival of recent illegal vessels, that the Jewish settlers on board are mostly in a disgusting state of filth and squalor, poorly dressed with few clothes, wild eyed, with hang-dog looks

⁴⁸ Archives Départementales des BDR 148W185, RG Report, 3.3.47.

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 275/87 Report by Captain J. Linklater, Officer Commanding 317 Airborne Field Security Section 9.3.47.

on their faces, hair dishevelled, and unshaven. Many are hysterical. The ships themselves are, if possible, in an even worse condition, with garbage and litter lying deep on the deck and stinking in a foul manner. This is acknowledged by Jews in Haifa, and by the Jewish press, as proof of the dreadful sufferings which the 'refugees' have been through.

He goes on to relate that exposed film taken off one of the immigrants from the Abril and taken a few days before interception "show smiling, plump, and confident faces of settlers and pioneers bound for the shores of a promised land. Their hair is tidy and well brushed, their boots polished, and their clothes sound, smart and efficient. Anything less like the ship which finally arrived in Haifa is hard to imagine."⁵⁰

Whilst this report might be considered as unrepresentative and a none-too-disguised attempt to denigrate the immigrants, there are other indications that the arrival of illegal immigrant ships in Haifa were well choreographed by the Mossad to engender an anti-British bias among the assembled press. Local reporters were particularly keen to report to their readers the number of children, pregnant women and stretcher cases on board. It was also not unusual to find that reporters, who had managed to establish contact with the Mossad in the USA or Europe accompanied the immigrants from their point of departure.

The Guardian (later renamed the Theodor Herzl) left Sète on 2nd April 1947 with 2,622 passengers. After interception on 13th April a furious battle ensued in which the boarding party used their guns. At the end there were 3 dead and 27 injured. According to the Commander of the Haydon, which led the interception, no adequate explanation was given for the scale of casualties. Orders had been given to fire over the heads of the 100 strong group of immigrants who resisted the boarding party.⁵¹ On board were a British journalist Moshe Perlman representing the Illustrated London News with a photographer called Auerbach and two French journalists, François Armorin of Franc-tireur and Joffroy of Le Parisien Libéré.⁵² They were chosen for the journey by the Mossad after being thoroughly vetted as to their political leanings. All were provided with assumed names in case they were arrested by the British. Armorin had a proper six-month visa for Palestine dated 15th October

⁵⁰ TNA, WO 275/87, Report by Captain J.Linklater, 20.3.47.

⁵¹ TNA, ADM1 20643, Report of commander of HMS Haydon, 16.4.47.

1946. He only disclosed this and his true identity when he was transferred to Cyprus with the rest of the passengers. After three weeks he was deported for illegal entry into Cyprus.⁵³ Whilst Armorin, a non-Jew and former Resistance member could be considered an independent witness, the same could not be said of Moshe Perlman who, notwithstanding his British passport, was responsible for Mossad's international press relations.⁵⁴

In Haifa a detailed report on the passengers was completed by the Field Security Section. This briefly stated that from conversations with the passengers (French, German, Belgian, Czech and Hungarian) and remarks overheard by field security officers, details of their route to the port of departure emerged. These disclosed that the passengers had arrived at the port of embarkation in about five trains of five hundred each. One train came from Czechoslovakia and one from Belgium. At the port of embarkation, the master of the ship at first refused to accept very young children and very pregnant women, but let himself be persuaded by a "Jewish Agency leader". It was an American ship, reasonably seaworthy but incredibly overcrowded. On the whole few passengers carried any documents at all, except for some left-wing and Communist Party cards and DP and UNRRA certificates. As the ship came alongside the quay in Haifa, the bodies of two Jews who had died during the boarding were produced, draped in Zionist flags. One of the passengers came forward and pointing dramatically at the corpses shouted in English "You killed him, assassins!" After an initial refusal to disembark, all the Jews on board suddenly decided to go ashore. Of the four journalists known to have been on board, the two English ones came forward and were handed over to CID. The others had not come forward. In his now familiar disparaging style, Captain Linklater reported on the Guardian incident, concluding

1. That there is a Jewish Agency organisation which lays down the propaganda policy for immigration and enforces the implementation thereof at all stages of the journey.
2. That the average Jew is a pawn in the game and does not himself, feel the need for such propaganda, although he may quite easily have swallowed the 'Palestine bait' hook

⁵² François Armorin, *Des Juifs quittent l'Europe*, (Paris, 1948), 30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁴ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 136.

line and sinker. He considers the journey more on the lines of an enterprising adventure rather than an escape from horror.

3. That at least Belgium and France are openly conniving at, if not assisting, illegal immigration into Palestine, since at least the organised train journey must have been known by the authorities. It would appear that the organisation in Europe is being carried out on a fantastic scale, quite openly.⁵⁵

Linklater's second comment reflects a commonly held belief in the Colonial administration that the Jews aboard illegal ships had been misled by propaganda and had been duped by unscrupulous Zionist organisers to leave the comparative safety of their DP Camps. However this simplistic assessment failed to recognise the profound needs of the DPs to escape from internment in countries they loathed and their ability to decide for themselves that, in the absence of any other offer of asylum, Palestine indeed offered the best chance of a new life.

On 18th July 1947 the Exodus '47 was intercepted off the Palestine coast. Given the world media attention attracted by this particular ship and the political and public relations storm it generated, a separate and wide-ranging chapter has been devoted to the Exodus Affair (see Chapter 7). The Affair also had repercussions on the Mossad's ability to operate in France. There is some evidence of the hardening of the French Government's attitude towards illegal immigration once the storm had abated. This is indicated in a report by a Mossad operative to Palestine on the activities of the French police during October and November 1947. He indicated that following a circular issued by the Ministry of the Interior on 5th September, a special department of the police was investigating such organisations as the AJ (Polonski's organisation), ORT (technical training organisation) and the Jewish National Fund. In early November the residents of the Hotel Metropole, which included a number of Mossad people, were subjected to an identity check, as was another Mossad location. However it was noted that the police inspectors involved were acting in a friendly manner and that their investigation was superficial. In the same period, however, the Ministry of the Interior issued an instruction to all the Préfectures bordering the Mediterranean that they must prevent illegal immigration of Jews, Italians and

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 275/87 Report on trans-shipment from the Guardian by Captain. J. Linklater.

Spanish from French and North African ports. Equally, ships' captains would be obliged in future to disclose the names of their passengers in order to identify illegal immigrants. Failure to do so could result in the loss of the captain's licence.

In addition, the Mossad's contacts in the French security services indicated that although such instructions had been issued, their implementation was dependent on individual regional authorities. It was also indicated that the French security services and the Ministry of the Interior had been infiltrated by British agents and therefore caution should be exercised by the Mossad in their activities.⁵⁶

Although it is difficult to hypothesise, the whole exercise may indeed have been carried out to allay British suspicions of continuing French duplicity after the Exodus Affair.

Allied to these moves by the French police, an RG report of October 1947 refers to the temporary arrest on 4th October of five Jews and a local fisherman who were caught surveying various inlets along the coast near Marseilles. It was immediately assumed that the intention was to locate embarkation points for illegal immigration. The interrogation of the individuals concerned revealed that one was Georges Loinger, another was "Welwel Pomeraniec", [i.e. Veruya Pomerantz later known as Ze'ev Hadari] both, as previously indicated, members of the Mossad. However, to the police Loinger represented himself as a director of the Jewish charity, Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (OSE) whilst Pomerantz described himself as a journalist working for Davar (The Histadrut's daily paper) and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. All the others, to the exclusion of the fisherman who was their guide, were connected with one or other Zionist institution. They all insisted that they were all out for a walk along the sea and therefore had the need for a guide. The fact that they were caught with a maritime map in their possession was, they asserted, purely coincidental. It was confirmed by the RG in their report that Loinger had already been in contact with their local office in La Ciotat, with a view, as he put it, to the legal embarkation of Jews from that port. A further factor placing the RG on the alert was the activities of Frederic Thau, the local representative of the FSJF. On frequent occasions in October he had sought to discover from the RG, the attitude of the police to a resumption of illegal immigration. It was also noted that 1,051 Jewish

⁵⁶ Haganah Archives, Aliyah Bet files, 14/732 "To 23 from Yanai".

immigrants had arrived by train in the department on 5th October and had been placed by the FSJF in their centres. A second convoy of 783 Jews arrived in Marseilles on 15th October and had been dealt with in the same way. There was therefore every reason to suppose that an attempt at illegal immigration was in the offing. The RG, on instructions from Paris, was determined to prevent that occurring and indicated the steps that were being taken.⁵⁷ But as far as those arrested were concerned, a phone call to Roger Wybot of the DST from the police station secured the release of the whole party.⁵⁸ Hadari, in his own memoirs also confirmed that the DST's intervention secured the release of the Mossad's men.⁵⁹

It would appear that the RG did not entirely succeed in their task to prevent further illegal immigration, for on 6th November a small ship, the Albertina (later renamed Aliyah) left Bandol, near Marseilles. It managed to evade the British blockade and safely land 187 immigrants at Nahariyah, in northern Palestine on 16th November. An Arab boy reported that at 5 o'clock in the morning he had seen four buses containing Jews leaving Nahariyah in an easterly direction.⁶⁰ Two weeks or so later, a small schooner renamed the Haforzim managed to slip through the blockade, land 167 immigrants near Tel Aviv and effect an escape undetected.⁶¹

On 12th December 1947 the Giovanni Maria (later renamed 29th November 1947) left France with 688 illegal immigrants on board. Earlier on 20th July Hungarian immigrants from Sweden had been allowed to land in France temporarily. They had originally been provided with visas by Raoul Wallenberg in 1944. In early December, they embarked on the Setti Fratelli at Bandol near Marseilles. They were then transferred off the coast of Corsica to the Giovanni Maria, newly arrived from Leghorn in Italy.⁶² The boat was intercepted by the British Navy on 28th December and the immigrants interned in Cyprus.⁶³

⁵⁷ Archives Départementales des BDR, 150W163, le Commissaire Principal to Directeur des RG, Paris (Section des Frontières), 22.10.47.

⁵⁸ Interview with Georges Loinger, 10.11.02.

⁵⁹ Hadari, *HaMossad*, 25.

⁶⁰ TNA, WO 275/87, Report by HQ 3rd Parachute Brigade.

⁶¹ Silverstone, 29.

⁶² TNA, CO 537/3942, letter from Consulate-General in Marseilles to British Embassy Paris, confirming details of the two ships received from the police authorities in Toulon. It was also noted that the captain of the Sette Fratelli was subsequently fined for embarking passengers at Bandol under conditions which endangered the safety of both passengers and ship, 11.2.48.

⁶³ TNA, ADM1 21092.

From party membership cards passed by Field Security to the CID, it appeared that the immigrants on the *Maria Giovanni* were connected either with left-wing or religious movements in Hungary, Germany, Romania and Austria.⁶⁴ Among those on board was a 17 year old youngster from Oran, Algeria, called Henri Cohen.

Part of the remains of Cohen's diary, written in French, was found on the quayside in Haifa after he attempted to destroy it during trans-shipment. The fragments were reconstructed by CID officers in the hope of obtaining some intelligence information. In the event all they could learn was that, finding himself and his cousin virtually destitute in Marseilles in mid-November 1947, they had been directed to 24 rue des Convalescents.⁶⁵ From there they were sent to a transit camp at Le Grand Arénas at Mazargues, some 7 kilometres from Marseilles. There, in the former prisoner of war camp, they met fellow Jews of all nationalities waiting for their turn to leave for Palestine. They spent their time working in the kitchens, sewing, singing, playing cards and learning Hebrew. On 1st December they rejoiced at the news that the UN had approved the partition plan for Palestine. One of the final entries in the diary was "Camp D'Arénas. 3rd December 1947. They gathered us all together and told us not to leave the camp as we might be going off any time."⁶⁶

A further three boats left in early 1948, no doubt carrying the rest of the DPs who arrived in October 1947. They were the *Abdul Hamid* (renamed *Komemiut*), the *Salvador* (renamed *Mishmar Ha'Emek*) and the *Tadome* (Renamed *Nachshon Kastel*). All were intercepted by the British and their passengers trans-shipped to Cyprus. There were other boats that left France in the spring of 1948 but they arrived in Palestine after the end of the Mandate and were therefore not illegal.

6.2 Overall statistical results

Before moving from the microcosm of France to the wider picture, we will recall that out of 63 illegal ships, only 15 actually sailed from France.⁶⁷ However, many others were fitted out in French shipyards or received fuel supplies there but

⁶⁴ TNA, CO 537/3941, CID, HQ Palestine Police Force to Chief Secretary, 27.1.48.

⁶⁵ The "immigration office" run by the FSJF.

⁶⁶ TNA, CO 537/3941. CID, HQ Palestine Police Force to Chief Secretary, 27.1.48.

⁶⁷ See Appendix 1(b), breakdown of illegal ships by country of departure.

picked up passengers in other foreign ports.⁶⁸ Although the names of the 63 ships that approached the shores of Palestine with illegal immigrants were easily identified from a number of primary and secondary sources, the recorded numbers of immigrants on each boat tended to vary slightly from one account to another.⁶⁹ Consequently the statistical analysis which follows will, of necessity, contain some margin of error:

In the last five months of 1945, eight boats with 1,041 immigrants successfully beached on the Palestine shore and only twenty immigrants were arrested and temporarily detained in Atlit. However during 1946, out of 22 boats containing 21,983 immigrants only one, the *Ideros*, managed to land some 183 immigrants undetected, whilst two other boats with 1,014 immigrants from La Spezia, Italy were treated as a special case and were allowed to land without interference.⁷⁰

In 1947, out of 24 boats containing 40,527 immigrants one, the *Ulua*, managed to beach itself, even after being captured, whilst three others managed to reach the shore without being intercepted. In the first case, 835 immigrants from the *Susannah* were immediately rounded-up by the army. In the other two cases, 187 immigrants from the *Aliyah* and 167 immigrants from the *Haforzim* successfully disappeared into the hinterland. Finally in the four months or so to 14th May 1948 eight out of nine illegal boats were intercepted and their 5,556 immigrants trans-shipped to Cyprus, if only to maintain the fiction of the continuing existence of the quota. The ninth ship, the *Archimedes*, managed on 1st January 1948 to land undetected 537 immigrants on the beach at Nahariyah, whilst the coastal watch was celebrating the New Year.⁷¹

For the sake of clarity, one ship has been left out of the statistical analysis because after it began to sink, all of its 500 immigrants were transferred to the *Lohita*. This 64th ship, as it were, was the *Agia-Anastasia*, which left Yugoslavia on 26th November 1946 in company with the *Athenia*.

⁶⁸ Hadari, *Second Exodus*, 141.

⁶⁹ See Appendix 1(a) for a ship by ship analysis.

⁷⁰ In May 1946 1014 illegal immigrants, embarked on the *Fede* and the *Felice*, were initially detained by the authorities at La Spezia in Italy through the intervention of the British Government. Under the leadership of Yehudah Arazi, the local Mossad head, they staged a very successful demonstration in the full glare of the world's press. After negotiations between the Colonial Office and the Jewish Agency, arranged through the good offices of Harold Laski of the British Labour Party, they were finally allowed to land in Palestine as part of the normal monthly quota.

6.3 Other perspectives on illegal immigration

An analysis of the point of departure of the 69,644 illegal immigrants who attempted to land in Palestine, shows that less than half actually came from the DP Camps of Germany and Austria. This was a comparatively small number when compared to the overall DP population which, in 1946, had risen to some 200,000 as a result of the massive Polish exodus. The reality was that some 39,000 came directly from transit camps in Italy (having crossed the border illegally after travelling across Czechoslovakia and Austria) or from their villages and towns in Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and even North Africa.⁷²

Kochavi argues that from early 1947, Soviet influence on the new Communist-dominated states of Romania and Bulgaria greatly facilitated the departure or transit of Jews from or through those countries. The Soviets' intention was to aggravate the position of the British in the Middle East and was part of Cold War politics. The Soviet support from the middle of 1947 for the establishment of a Jewish State was also part of that policy. The Mossad therefore took advantage of the favourable climate then existing in that part of the world and swung its efforts away from the Mediterranean and towards the Black Sea.⁷³ The result was the sailing in December 1947 of the two Pan ships from Bulgaria, containing over 15,000 Romanian immigrants en route for Palestine. This far surpassed anything the Mossad had achieved to date in terms of numbers. As a sign of changing times -the British by now having indicated that they were leaving Palestine- an accommodation was reached with the Jewish Agency, whereby the two boats would sail directly to Cyprus.

The fact that embarkations from the Balkan ports alone accounted for some 40% of the immigrants effectively explodes the myth that the rescue of Jews from the DP Camps was the priority.⁷⁴ In reality wherever large numbers of immigrants were more readily accessible, pragmatic considerations led the Mossad to choose that easier option, rather than attempt to satisfy others who had a more urgent need.

⁷¹ TNA, WO 275/87 Report dated 1st January 1948 on beaching of the illegal ship Archimedes.

⁷² Hagit Lavski, New Beginnings, Holocaust Survivors in Bergen Belsen and the British Zone in Germany 1945-1950 (Detroit, 2002), 36.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁴ Kochavi, Post-Holocaust Politics, 199.

Another controversial feature of Aliyah Bet was the question of how the candidates for illegal immigration were chosen. That selectivity of candidates, according to well-defined criteria, for Aliyah towards Eretz Israel was axiomatic within the Zionist establishment before the Second World War is undeniable. At that time the essential criterion was whether a potential immigrant possessed a "pioneering spirit", a prerequisite for the harsh and austere life on kibbutz.⁷⁵

The question is: To what extent was this abandoned when confronted with the plight of the She'erit Hapletah (Holocaust survivors) in the DP Camps? According to Tuvia Friling, Ben Gurion had already accepted in 1943, when the news of extermination of the Jews was widely known, that this policy no longer had any validity. However, faced with a restrictive British immigration quota there were others who insisted that preference still be given to "Quality Aliyah." Against this, calls within the Jewish Agency for mass, indiscriminate Aliyah, seemed to many members to be totally unrealistic.⁷⁶

After his visits to the DP Camps in the American Zone in Germany in October 1945, Ben Gurion returned to Palestine. He reported to the Agency's Executive that he had secured the agreement of the American military authorities that the Jews would be given a large measure of autonomy and that emissaries from the Yishuv would be permitted to enter the camps for the purpose of instruction. However, it later became clear that each of these emissaries would bring with him the particular ideology of the political movement to which he belonged and that he would seek among the candidates for illegal immigration those who were prepared to adhere to that ideology.⁷⁷

This state of affairs is confirmed by Anita Shapira, who contends that politics was at the root of selection. She points to the split in Mapai in 1944, when Achdut Avodah, part of the Kibbutz Hameuchad movement, led by Yitshak Tabenkin defected. As this left Mapai with only a 53% majority in the Histadrut (Federation of Labour), the political orientation of the new wave of immigrants was crucial to Mapai's hegemony. As to the kibbutz movement, the lack of immigrants in the war

⁷⁵ Hadari, *Voyage to Freedom*, 48.

⁷⁶ Tuvia Friling, "Changing Roles: The Relationship between Ben Gurion, the Yishuv and Sh'erit Hapletah 1942-1945 in Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., *Conference Proceedings. Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference 1985* (Jerusalem, 1990), 466/467.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

years had frozen the growth, originally fuelled from Poland and they were now desperate for new recruits.⁷⁸

An emphasis on the youth of those selected for illegal immigration is indicated by Nahum Bogner, who comments that 80% of the 52,000 or so illegal immigrants deported to Cyprus were aged between 12 and 35. Amongst these were some 8000 orphans.⁷⁹ Furthermore, as Mankowitz comments, most of the illegal immigrants who left Germany in 1946 were members of kibbutz movements who were allocated Entry Certificates proportional to the size of their movements.⁸⁰

For her part, Dalia Ofer comments on the changing approach of the historiography of Aliyah Bet from the beginning of 1980, which now recognised that the Yishuv's professed willingness to rescue all Jews from Eastern Europe was not such a clear-cut issue. In particular she underlines the failure, in the early historiography, to deal with such matters as the conflicts which arose after the war between the emissaries on the ground and the political leadership regarding the criteria for the selection of immigrants.⁸¹

Even when prospective immigrants had to be chosen for the 750 certificates allocated each month to the Cyprus detainees, the Jewish Agency did not strictly apply the "first in, first out" principle. As a British officer reported, there was an order of priority. Basically Palyam escorts and ships' crews came first and these were followed by compassionate cases and pregnant women. Next came Haganah members who had been deliberately infiltrated into the camps. Finally about 50% of the quota was allocated to those Jews who had actually been waiting their turn.⁸²

With the majority of emissaries to the DP Camps emanating from the kibbutz movement it is not difficult to assess the profile of the candidates they were seeking. They were to be young, pioneering and ideologically motivated. Selection, however

⁷⁸ Anita Shapira, "The Yishuv's encounter with the survivors of the Holocaust" in Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., Conference Proceedings. Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, 1985 (Jerusalem, 1990), 81.

⁷⁹ Nahum Bogner, "Holocaust Survivors in the Cyprus detention camps" in Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., Conference Proceedings. Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference 1985, (Jerusalem, 1990), 418.

⁸⁰ Zeev Mankowitz, Life between Memory and Hope: The survivors of the Holocaust In Occupied Germany (Cambridge, 2002), 272.

⁸¹ Dalia Ofer, "The Historiography of Aliyah Bet" in Yisrael Gutman and Gideon Greif, eds., Conference Proceedings. Fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference 1983, (Jerusalem, 1988), 599.

unfair to the old and the infirm, was part and parcel of the whole process of illegal immigration. In mitigation it would only be fair to consider that the journey for prospective illegal immigrants was certainly not devoid of hardships or danger and therefore required a certain level of fitness. However how this could be applied to pregnant women, who often made the hazardous journey, remains questionable as the experience of the Exodus illustrates (see Chapter 7).

The brief given to the British delegation to the UN in November 1947, includes the following statement about illegal immigration which, although clearly partisan, is perhaps not entirely devoid of truth

Humanitarian considerations take only secondary place in the minds of the organisers. It is only infrequently that the real compassionate cases, the relatives of people in Palestine, the sick and the old are included in the shiploads of illegal immigrants. The human cargoes consist mainly of young men and women ; pregnant women are particularly included because of their propaganda value in the event of an incident involving loss of life.⁸³

In the historiography a largely forgotten, not to say marginalized , aspect of immigration into Palestine is that from January 1946 the British had actually made available for entry into Palestine a quota of 18,000 Jewish immigrants per year. Generally, any reference made by Zionists to this quota, sought to underline how inadequate it was given the thousands of Jews confined to DP Camps. Yet in theory at least, Entry Certificates were available to many Jews in Europe, particularly those with relatives already in Palestine. In January 1947, there was a waiting list of some 6,000 at the Department of Migration in Palestine.⁸⁴ Certificates were also reserved, in priority, for those Palestinians who had fought in the British army during the war and their dependants.

The official quota lost real significance for legal immigrants as a result of an arbitrary decision by the High Commissioner, supported by the Colonial Office, to find a speedy solution to the thousands of illegal immigrants he already had on his

⁸² TNA, CO 537/2385, Tour report by an officer sent under orders of GHQ, MELF, June 1947.

⁸³ TNA, CO 537/2345, Copy of brief to Martin in New York on suggested statement to UN Assembly, November 1947.

⁸⁴ TNA, CO 537/2276, Letter from The High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10.1.47.

hands. In essence, illegal immigrants were substituted for legal immigrants in allocating the monthly quota. However as the number of illegal immigrants swamped the quota in the first half of 1946, they were initially detained and only released from the Ahtlit detention camp as the quota was freed up in subsequent months. This process accelerated after August 1946, when instead of detention in Athlit, illegal immigrants were taken to camps in Cyprus. As a result Athlit was cleared of illegal immigrants by November 1946 and the following month, for the first time, a quota of 750 certificates per month was granted to the Cyprus detainees.

This reduced allocation to illegal immigrants did not bring a commensurate benefit to waiting legal immigrants as the next 300 certificates were then granted in priority to DPs in the British Zone in Germany. Despite demands from the Jewish Agency none were allocated to the American Zone where the majority of DPs resided.⁸⁵ Starting in April 1947 under an operation termed “Grand National”, DPs for the first time legally left the British Zone for Palestine. By the end of the year 3,700 had arrived under the scheme. Officially the monthly quota of 1,500 was now allocated as to:

Jews in Cyprus: 750; Servicemen recruited in Palestine :150; Parents and children of people in Palestine :275; British Zones of Austria and Germany :300; French Zones of Austria and Germany: 25.⁸⁶

The irony of applying part of the official quota to the illegal immigrants in Cyprus was not lost on the Foreign Office, which complained that its whole policy of deterring governments around the Mediterranean from permitting the departure of illegal ships was being totally undermined by the pragmatic approach of the Colonial Office.⁸⁷ If the Foreign Office had hoped to staunch the flow of illegal immigrants by the prospect of detention in Cyprus, this gambit had obviously failed, for 1947 saw an increasing number of illegal immigrants on ever larger boats. Creech Jones at the Colonial Office struggled to increase the capacity of the camps in Cyprus and rejected calls to reallocate the quota away from the detainees in Cyprus to DPs in

⁸⁵ TNA, CO 437/2277, Telegramme from Creech Jones, Colonial Secretary to High Commissioner, 1.8.47.

⁸⁶ TNA, CO 537/2369, Letter from Foreign Office to Paris and Rome embassies, 3.10.47.

⁸⁷ TNA, FO 945/469 Correspondence between Frank Pakenham at the Foreign Office and Creech Jones, 16.7.47.

Germany. In a letter to the British official responsible for DPs in Germany he revealed that if the accommodation problem in Cyprus reached crisis proportions, without the prospect of finding accommodation on some other British possession "we should have to admit that we were beaten by the illegal immigration problem with incalculable political consequences."⁸⁸

Creech Jones's foresight was vindicated, for when the Pan ships disgorged over 15,000 illegal immigrants in Cyprus at the end of December 1947, the camps were just about able to absorb them. The shipment of the 4,500 Exodus immigrants from France to Germany in August 1947 also indirectly relieved the Cyprus situation.

Of the 51,594 illegal immigrants who arrived in Cyprus between August 1946 and April 1948 there remained some 23,500 when the State of Israel came into being.⁸⁹ If the quota of 750 certificates per month had been strictly maintained there would have been thousands more. But from the moment the British decided to leave Palestine, the release of so-called 'compassionate cases' from Cyprus reached ever increasing levels.⁹⁰ The colonial Secretary later divulged to the British UN delegation that this was the reason why the quota had been exceeded by some 13,500 Jews. He requested that the information not be revealed "as you know prospects of unfavourable Arab reaction has prevented us giving publicity to these figures."⁹¹ Implicitly, even if the Arabs were unaware of this massive breach of the quota system, the Jewish Agency was not. Clearly both the British and the Zionists adopted a pragmatic approach when their interests coincided. However the irony of the story is that despite this cosy arrangement a further 5,600 illegal immigrants were trans-shipped to Cyprus in the first four months of 1948, following the interception of eight ships. Fritz Liebreich's assertion that the British had abandoned its fight against illegal immigration only became a reality in the very last days of the Mandate.⁹²

Following a UN embargo in July 1948 on supplying arms and men of military age to Palestine, the British ceased releasing men in this category and their

⁸⁸ TNA, CO 537/2276, Correspondence between John Hind (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster) and Creech Jones, 24.3.47 and 8.4.47.

⁸⁹ TNA, CO 67/364/4 Report from the Acting Governor of Cyprus to Colonial Secretary, 24.3.49. The report also revealed that during the period there had been 120 deaths and 1,916 births in the camps.

⁹⁰ TNA, CO 537/2386, Memo From Commissioner for Jewish Camps to British delegation in New York, 13.10.47. Also FO 371/61894 Telegramme from High Commissioner to the Governor of Cyprus, 19.11.47.

⁹¹ TNA, CO 537/3939, Memo from Colonial Secretary to British delegation in New York, 21.4.48.

families remained in Cyprus too. It was not until February 1949, after appeals from the Governor of Cyprus to the Colonial Office that the last 12,000 or so were finally released.⁹³ A discrepancy in the final numbers indicated that over the previous period some 1,600 had tunnelled their way out or found some other means of escape from the camps. It is a reasonable assumption, given the Mossad's increasing use of larger ships which were difficult to board at sea, and the reservoir of Jews prepared to make the hazardous journey to Palestine, that the ongoing policy of interception at sea and detention in Cyprus would have been unsustainable in the medium term. However once the British had signalled, in the latter part of 1947, their intention to leave Palestine the whole question became academic. Nevertheless to the credit of the Palestine Naval Patrol and the Colonial Office, in terms of actual permitted entry into Palestine, as opposed to the arrivals in Cyprus, the Mossad hardly managed to breach the official annual quota of 18,000 immigrants during 1946 and 1947.⁹⁴ But they came pretty close.

A quite separate perspective on illegal immigration is provided by the Royal Navy. It is set out in a book written by one of its official historians, Ninian Stewart. As one would expect a large part of his book is a detailed analysis of each interception and the naval forces that comprised the Palestine Patrol at the time. Nevertheless Stewart does reflect on the humanitarian side of the operation. This extract summarises the attitudes of the sailors involved

Despite their knowledge of what the Jews had suffered from Hitler, members of Ships' companies might be expected to be antagonised by immigrants who showed them so much hostility and whose compatriots were killing and kidnapping British servicemen. Nevertheless contemporary accounts show that whilst contemptuous of the squalor, members of boarding parties remained fair minded, were not given to excessive force and, once opposition ceased did what they could to ease the lot of the immigrants, provide first aid and make friends.⁹⁵

⁹² Liebreich, 191.

⁹³ TNA, CO 537/4058, letter from Governor of Cyprus to Colonial Secretary, 15.12.48.

⁹⁴ Archives Nationales, F7/16107, According to a RG report entitled « Israel and Zionism », the numbers of Jewish entrants to Palestine were 1946 :18,000 ; 1947 :21,000 ; 1.1.48 to 14.5.48 :17,000. After the creation of the State on 15th May a further 102,000 entered by the end of the year. Report dated 17.6.58.

⁹⁵ Ninian Stewart, The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol (London, 1997), 174.

In reviewing Stewart's book in 2004 Ronald Zweig, of Tel Aviv University, expresses the view that in the public relations war being fought, the struggle against illegal immigration was devastating to Britain's reputation as the Mandatory power. Nevertheless he emphasises that the organisers of Aliyah Bet and Jewish opinion in general relied heavily on the fact that the British applied humanitarian standards in their interception policy. "A determined naval power that had no humanitarian scruples could easily have ended the flow of refugees. A few sinkings at sea would have had a powerful deterrent effect."⁹⁶ Of course at the time, Zionist propaganda did not acknowledge that the Royal Navy's actions contained any element of restraint and continued to portray each interception as akin to piracy at sea.

Having read many of the reports on interceptions emanating from Admiralty and War Office sources it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, given the British Government's policy on the matter of illegal immigration, the officers concerned were generally carrying out their duties in the most humane manner possible. Although there is, in these reports, some stereotyping of Jews and the occasional derogatory remark, a charge of antisemitism would be difficult to justify. At the 50th anniversary reunion of illegal vessel crews held in Israel in 1997, the Royal Navy's unique forbearance was acknowledged and praised by those directly involved on the illegal immigration side.⁹⁷

What has emerged from this narrative is that the British were aware that they were engaged in a losing propaganda war with the Zionists, even if the results of interception proved that the naval blockade of Palestine was in general very effective. Deporting illegal immigrants to Cyprus as a deterrent, proved ineffective in the long term, as the camp populations had to be constantly reduced by transferring the inmates to Palestine, in order to provide room for new detainees.

The only policy which might have kept immigrants out of Palestine was one originally suggested by the army to counteract the failure of existing measures, which still allowed illegal immigrants to remain in Palestine after a brief internment in Atlit. The army's suggestion, in February 1946, was to return illegal immigrants

⁹⁶ Ronald Zweig, "The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol", *War in History* 11(2) (London, 2004), 233.

⁹⁷ Stewart, 174.

right back to their point of departure. However at the time this was considered impractical, let alone highly controversial.⁹⁸ When this policy, later known as “Refoulement” was finally applied in the case of the President Warfield in July 1947, it led to the famous Exodus Affair and this had the most disastrous public relations effect for the British Government and was never again attempted.

⁹⁸ TNA, WO 204/49 Report on Illegal immigration into Palestine. From Middle East Force to CIC Central Mediterranean Forces, 18.2.46.

CHAPTER 7 The Exodus Affair

The consequences of the Exodus Affair from a public relations and political point of view went far beyond anything previously experienced in the confrontation with the British over illegal immigration. Unwillingly drawn into the human drama rapidly developing in Marseilles, the French Government found itself squeezed between its Zionist friends in France and Palestine and its former ally, the British. Both the Yishuv and Britain saw the Exodus Affair as a test of wills.

Bevin was determined to score on two accounts: Firstly to show the Yishuv that the easy option of internment in Cyprus was no longer available and that immigrants would be returned to their country of departure. Secondly to bring home to the French that they could no longer facilitate the transit of DPs across France to their ports of departure without repercussions. The new British policy, that of 'Refoulement' was to return to the point of departure all illegal immigrants captured at sea. It was perceived that the ensuing embarrassment and inconvenience of having to contend with thousands of unwanted immigrants would force the French authorities to curtail their covert assistance. The same policy was to be adopted for Italy.

The Exodus Affair, which began in July 1947, coincided with the launch of the Marshall Plan, a massive American injection of material and funds, devised by the American Secretary of State, George Marshall, to regenerate the European economies. For the sake of both countries, it was essential that Great Britain and France worked in concert and that no bilateral problems interfered with the understandings that Bidault had so assiduously built up with Bevin. In response to George Marshall's initiative a Foreign Ministers' conference had been called in Paris for 12th July, at which it was intended to formulate a comprehensive rehabilitation programme to meet Europe's needs.¹ Bevin and Bidault were to be the joint sponsors of the conference. It was by no means an appropriate moment for a much less significant issue, such as the departure of the President Warfield, to cause political embarrassment.

In this epic saga the three contestants either increased their prestige to a greater or lesser extent or suffered ignominy. The French Government, rent by internal conflicts between Ministers, took no decisive steps, except to refuse any assistance to forcefully disembark the passengers from the three prison ships in the

¹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 53.

harbour of Port-de-Bouc. In the face of this impasse, the British kept the boats in the harbour for over three weeks, hoping that the conditions on board would finally convince the passengers to disembark peacefully, offering as the only alternative their return to Germany and internment. In Palestine, Ben Gurion, anxious to reap as much public relations benefit as possible from the British discomfiture, used all his contacts in France to ensure that the Government would take no action because of British pressure to bring the stand-off to an end by a forced evacuation of the ships. There is no doubt however that, as a result of the rugged determination of the passengers to remain on board until they were safely landed in Palestine, politely refusing all offers by the French of asylum, the Exodus Affair, as a public relations exercise, was disastrous for the British, a qualified success for the French and a triumph for the Zionists.

7.1 The Exodus story

In early June 1947, with UNSCOP in Palestine preparing for the meeting of the UN General Assembly in September, the temptation for the Mossad to score a public relations coup proved irresistible. It also responded to Yigal Allon's call to his men in Europe to expedite the movement of ships precisely during this period.²

From 22nd June 1947 over 4,000 DPs were transported from Germany to Southern France in one of the most ambitious and complex operations the Mossad had ever attempted.³ Prior to their departure it was necessary that transit visas be delivered by the French consular authorities. To avoid the preparation of individual visas, Marcel Pagès, presumably at the request of his friend L'Abbé Glasberg, indicated that a collective transit visa would suffice for Ministry of the Interior purposes. Given the time constraints, members of the Mossad concocted overnight a fictitious list of 858 would-be immigrants and delivered it to Marcel Pages in early June. A fully authorised collective transit visa was then issued by the French vice-consul in the American Zone on 23rd June.

As it was in duplicate, the copy was also used, thus conferring transit rights on twice the original number.⁴ Once again the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's

² Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Halamish, 47.

opposition to mass movements of this nature had been circumvented.⁵ The DPs were assembled and split into five groups. Three road convoys carried the majority of the DPs together with hastily arranged forged papers prepared by a fictitious Mossad entity called The Jewish Refugee Aid Society.⁶ They were provided with food and other essentials by the Haganah command in Germany, as they set off across the French Zone to the border with France.⁷ The other immigrants, using respectively the two copies of the authentic collective visa, boarded specially chartered trains near Munich. These included some DPs from Bergen-Belsen in the British Zone who had been secretly smuggled into the American Zone, the point of departure.⁸ The whole operation was carried out with military precision and was completed within eight days.

Information later gleaned by CID officers in Haifa from the immigrants who were being transferred from the Exodus to prison ships, indicated that many had originated from the Landsberg DP Camp in Germany and that they had come by train to Marseilles where they had been accommodated in a large number of private houses. They had remained indoors for a period of two weeks and then proceeded by night in ex-army trucks to Sète.⁹ At the moment of embarkation, it was anticipated that the French authorities would insist on inspecting the entry visas for the country of ultimate destination. To meet this need, the Mossad managed, for a price, to convince the Columbian Consul to furnish a load of blank visas and the necessary stamps. It only remained for photographs of the immigrants to be taken in the various transit camps. In the space of a few days, with the active cooperation of the street photographers of Marseilles and the Mossad's expert team of forgers in Lyon, the task was accomplished.¹⁰ Hadari himself was one of the team who stamped the visas in the washroom of his hotel.¹¹

British surveillance of the President Warfield had been extensive from the moment it had left its American home. Originally a river steamer, which had seen service during WW2, it was acquired in the USA in 1946 by a Mossad-front company. After a call at Marseilles it arrived at La Spezia in Italy but because of

⁵ Halamish, 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷ Ben David, 267.

⁸ Arie Boaz, Olam Vnochet Bechol: Hayech Shaul Avigur (Tel Aviv, 2001), 212.

⁹ PRO, FO 537/2400, CID to Chief Secretary Palestine Government, 21.7.47.

¹⁰ Zertal, Catastrophe, 67.

¹¹ Hadari, HaMossad, 21.

British pressure on the authorities there it then left again, accompanied by an Italian torpedo boat, for French territorial waters. It arrived at Port-de-Bouc on 13th June. Here it was extensively refitted to carry passengers and took on board large amounts of fuel. It was thoroughly searched by RG agents and customs officers without finding anything illegal.¹² However there can be little doubt that these officials and indeed the workers in the port were well aware of the intended use and destination of the President Warfield. A few weeks later it was decided by the Mossad to move the boat to Sète in Jules Moch's constituency, where the likelihood of interference by the authorities was considered negligible. When the boat arrived on the night of 9th July however, British alarm bells began to ring. The following morning Captain Courtney of the SIS arranged for aerial photographs to be taken of the boat and the results were immediately sent to the British Embassy in Paris. London was informed and Bevin instructed the British Ambassador, Duff Cooper, to make urgent representations to the MAE to prevent or delay its sailing for as long as possible.¹³

At 4 am on 10th July the process of embarking the immigrants on the President Warfield was commenced. The passenger list comprised 1615 men, 1784 women, 170 youngsters and 685 children. These included, in addition to the DPs from Germany, over 150 immigrants from North Africa and France. The arrival of these 4,554 immigrants at the embarkation point had not been without some last minute hitches as the movement of the 178 lorries involved was temporarily blocked by a general strike covering the whole of France. A million franc donation to the strikers' fund by the Mossad enabled the CGT, the Communist-run union, to remove all obstacles.¹⁴ Embarkation was completed at 1pm under the supervision of the French police and the more covert surveillance of the SIS, just as a stage of the Tour de France (annual cycle race) swept through Sète.

The sudden activity of the SIS had not escaped the attention of Wybot's DST men in Marseilles. Wybot immediately warned the Mossad chief, Shaul Meirov, that the British Ambassador was about to inform the French Minister of Foreign Affairs of the impending departure of the President Warfield.¹⁵ To forestall Bidault's attempts to stop the sailing, Venya Pomerantz was immediately despatched to seek

¹² Archives Départementales des BDR, 150W163, RG du Port-de-Bouc à Chef des RG, 4.7.47.

¹³ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 54.

¹⁴ Yoram Kaniuk, *Il Commanda l'Exodus* (Paris, 2000), 173.

the help of his political contacts and friendly civil servants in the French administration, but he met with little success. Paul Ramadier, the Prime Minister on the eve of an important conference with the British was no more inclined than Bidault to upset Bevin, due to arrive on the 12th. Even Léon Blum and Daniel Mayer counselled prudence.¹⁶ Bidault put pressure on Jules Moch, responsible as he was for maritime matters, to forbid the sailing on the basis that the ship was not equipped with sufficient lifeboats and the captain was unable to produce a certificate of seaworthiness. Concurrently at a more local level, the British Consul managed to convince the maritime authorities of these facts, and the captain was then forbidden to set sail. That same afternoon an attempt by the maritime authorities to remove a part of the ship's engine to immobilise her, was thwarted by the captain. In the evening he set off with a delegation to the Préfecture at Montpellier to plead for the ship's release, but to no avail.

It was left to Depreux, with Wybot's support, to give a surreptitious green light to Pomerantz for the ship to sail: "Go ahead but be quick or soon it will be too late."¹⁷ The captain of the Warfield, an American by the name of Ike Aronowicz, was however faced with a number of constraints. The authorities ensured that no maritime pilot or tug were available and police were on hand to ensure that the boat remained moored to the quay. At 7.15 pm 'Rudy' Zameret received a radio message from Paris to dispense two or three million francs to facilitate the departure.¹⁸ However despite the promise of a massive fee to a local pilot, the latter failed to materialise.¹⁹

A while later the Palyam Commander on board, Yossi Harel came under intense pressure from the Mossad in Paris. According to Ze'ev Hadari he personally phoned Harel with the following message from Meirov

I am informing you that all our efforts to enable the sailing of the vessel through negotiations with the central French authorities have failed. You must set out on your own. You must sail whatever happens. We have arranged for them to look the other way if you do this. Therefore you must sail and take whatever opportunities come your way. Do not argue, that is an order, understand?²⁰

¹⁵ Boaz, 212.

¹⁶ Bernert, 158.

¹⁷ Derogy, *La Loi du Retour*, 146.

¹⁸ Hadari, *HaMossad*, Transmission taken from the Mossad's Operational log, 112.

¹⁹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 70.

²⁰ Hadari, *HaMossad*, 44.

This telephone message was reinforced by a radio message from Meirov himself (code name: Ben Yehudah) at 9.15 pm, in which he intimated that costs were not a factor if this helped to have the boat released.²¹ A further radio message at midnight from Pomerantz reflected an increasing sense of desperation. He announced that if any port workers, who aided the departure of the ship, lost their jobs as a result, a fund of five million francs was available to compensate them.²² A decision was finally made and at 4.30 am on the morning of 11th July the mooring ropes were hacked off at the ship's end and she slowly moved out of the harbour. Almost immediately she became stuck on a sandbank at the port entrance. After one and a half hours of risky manoeuvres, she was eventually extricated and set out for the open sea. The port authorities followed her progress through binoculars and then alerted the British Consulate in Marseilles.²³

In conversations much later with his biographer, Yossi Harel freely confessed that he persuaded the captain of the boat, Ike Aronowicz, to take the boat out of the port against his better judgement. When they were then stalled on the sand bank at the port entrance, Harel ordered the engines to be pushed beyond their safety limit, risking that the boilers would explode, in order to free the boat.²⁴

Shortly after the sailing, Ze'ev Hadari and L'Abbé Glasberg convinced François Armorin at Franc-Tireur to write an article sympathetic to the immigrants on board the President Warfield. The public relations exercise had already begun.²⁵

Bevin's outrage, when he arrived the following day in Paris to co-chair the economic conference with Bidault, is wonderfully encapsulated in a letter he sent to Bidault following a private meeting earlier that day. An extract from the original letter found in the files of the MAE, is reproduced here in order to give the clearest illustration of Bevin's frustration and anger at what he regarded as France's continuing cavalier attitude towards Illegal Immigration.

²¹ Hadari, HaMossad. Transmission taken from the Mossad's Operational log, 112.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Archives Nationales. F7/16089, Telephone conversation between Ministère de l'Intérieur and Secrétaire Général of the Département du Hérault, giving chronological order of the events, 21.7.47.

²⁴ Kaniuk, 180-182.

²⁵ Lucien Lazare, L'Abbé Glasberg, 93.

Dear Mr. Bidault,

On numerous occasions in the past few months we have appealed to our French friends to help us in our difficult task in Palestine by taking all possible steps to stop the illicit Jewish traffic through France. The French Government have responded by giving assurances that among other things the validity of the visa would be closely scrutinised before they were allowed to leave France and that the provisions of the international conventions regarding the safety of life at sea would be rigorously applied to ships suspected of participating in the traffic.

As recently as 27th June I wrote to Your Excellency once again invoking your help and requesting in particular that a ship the President Warfield should be strictly controlled in accordance with the requests made to your Ministry by HM's Embassy.

As I told you this morning, I was dismayed to find on arriving in Paris that not only had the President Warfield escaped from France but that she had been permitted to embark some 4,000 illicit immigrants in spite of the fact that she possessed a clearance certificate valid for only one journey without passengers and in fine weather.

In the circumstances I must protest most strongly against the facilities which have been accorded to the President Warfield and I request that the French Government should readmit her to France with all the passengers on board as soon as arrangements can be made to cause the President Warfield to return.

... I should also be grateful to learn that the necessary disciplinary measures have been taken as regards those who permitted her departure in contradiction with the assurances of the French Government.

... I take this opportunity to remind you that among the suspect vessels in French ports are the Paducah and the Northlands which are at Bayonne and the Bruna and the Luciano and the Archangelos which are at Marseilles.

I shall be glad if, in view of the departure of the President Warfield, you will agree to maintain a warship in the vicinity of Marseilles with standing orders to stop any of these vessels which may leave port. You will realise that only a French vessel can take effective action to prevent clandestine embarkation of illegal immigrants in French territorial waters.

I am, Dear Mr. Bidault, yours sincerely
Ernest Bevin.²⁶

Bevin then pursued the matter with Paul Ramadier, the Prime Minister, and hinted darkly that France's benign attitude to illegal immigration from its ports could well have unfortunate repercussions for French interests in North Africa.²⁷

The British Embassy entered the fray by throwing doubt on the validity of the individual Columbian entry visas which had been presented. The response of the

²⁶ MAE Archives, Immigration, File 376, 12.7.47.

²⁷ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 266.

French was that they were not allowed to query their authenticity.²⁸ In fact the Government issued a press release indicating that it had never committed itself to the British Government to check individual, as opposed to collective, entry visas delivered by foreign consulates.²⁹

Marcel Pagès was later to assert that each person on the list carried an individual Columbian visa delivered by its consulate in Marseilles and a proper French exit visa delivered by the Préfecture of the Bouches-du-Rhône.³⁰ Another report stated that the Préfecture had acted in accordance with an authority from the Ministry of the Interior dated 26th June.³¹ All these affirmations were backed up by Renseignements Généraux whose agents had checked the documents of those who had embarked.³² This flurry of reports and Government statements issued after the escape of the President Warfield from Sète were, as it later turned out, carefully drafted and coordinated to reassure the Cabinet and Prime Minister that correct procedures had been adhered to at all times by the authorities concerned.³³

The Government of Columbia then intervened to assert that the visas were indeed fakes and that in any case they would have refused to accept the DPs.³⁴ This statement therefore disavows a note previously issued by the Columbian Consul in Marseilles, where he states categorically that he was prepared to deliver visas to immigrants from Germany, subject to exit visas being issued by the Préfecture.³⁵

From the moment the President Warfield left Sète, she was continuously shadowed by Royal Navy ships and Lancasters of the Royal Air Force. On 18th July she was rammed and forcibly boarded off the coast of Palestine. A report to the Chief Secretary at the Colonial Office indicated that very strong resistance had been offered during the boarding operation. Smoke bombs, oil fuel jets, steam jets as well as fireworks and tins of corned beef were amongst the weapons employed by the immigrants. Naval officers fired shots, in one case to stop a rating being decapitated with an axe and in another when an immigrant was seen wielding a rifle. No other

²⁸ Lazard, 82.

²⁹ Archives Nationales. F7/16089 Press release, 1.8.47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Memo from Direction de la Réglementation to President du Conseil, 16.7.47.

³¹ Archives Nationales, Report on departure of President Warfield by M. Jutin, Secretary General of the Department of the Hérault, 12.7.47.

³² Haganah Archives, Blumel files 123/Blumel/2. RG Sète to Director of RG in Paris, 11.7.47.

³³ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 72.

³⁴ *L'Aurore*, 25.7.47.

³⁵ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2, Note signed by General Jose Delano, Consul of the Republic of Columbia, Marseilles, 2.7.47.

case of the use of such lethal weapons by immigrants has been reported. Casualties suffered by crew and immigrants were two men dead and 28 immigrants taken to the Government hospital in Haifa, one of whom later died. Many other immigrants were injured but these were dealt with on the spot.³⁶ After the seriously injured and dead were removed the rest of the passengers were then transferred to three prison ships, the Ocean Vigour, the Runnymede Park and the Empire Rival. After sailing away, the passengers discovered that they were not headed for Cyprus, but for France.

As with previous intercepted boats, there remained a controversy over whether the Exodus had been boarded within the three mile limit. The British contended, despite indications to the contrary, that the interception complied with international law. This was because the Admiralty was aware that detaining vessels on the high seas was *prima facie* illegal and could be used as a defence in court to prevent confiscation of the boat and the detention of the crew. Nevertheless, practical considerations led many a naval captain to board and seize boats well outside the 3 mile limit in order to prevent a determined dash to beach the boat on the shore. As a rule of thumb, boarding and seizure had to be effected the same number of miles from the shore as the number of knots the ship was travelling. Thus at a speed of seven knots, the boarding party had to take control some seven miles from the shore. With bigger and faster ships, even an interception and boarding at some twelve miles from shore became quite common.³⁷

A letter from the Admiralty in 1947 to the Foreign Office, provides the clearest indication that both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office were fully aware that ships were being boarded outside the three mile limit. The letter states

May you be forgiven for the last paragraph of your letter... of the 7th November to Higham [Colonial Office] about the relation between the territorial water and arrest at sea... I do not think you can really get away with the view that the Foreign Office have not been informed that ships are, in fact, being boarded outside territorial waters. I thought in any case that this was common knowledge between us and the whole purpose of the correspondence was to regularize the position. I trust that this complicated matter will not have to be pursued further in view of the imminence of our departure from Palestine.³⁸

³⁶ TNA, CO 537/2400, C.I.D. Jerusalem to Chief Secretary, 21.7.47.

³⁷ TNA, ADM1 23526, Assessment by the CIC Mediterranean, 31.3.47.

The Exodus is unlikely to have been the exception to the rule and was therefore most likely boarded well outside the territorial waters of Palestine.

7.2 Public relations issues

To counter the adverse publicity in the world's press occasioned by acts of terrorism and other forms of armed action in Palestine against British rule, both the Jewish Agency and the Revisionists used propaganda tools to persuade world public opinion of the justice of the Zionist cause. In the post-war anti-colonial atmosphere in the United States this was put to good effect. In particular the newsreel pictures of blood-spattered and bandaged illegal immigrants being dragged along the quay in Haifa by soldiers to prison ships, caused immense harm to the British Government's image abroad. The stories of interception and boarding at sea, with graphic descriptions of the fights which ensued, were reported on at length. Whatever the true circumstances, the vision of white-helmeted sailors clubbing men, women and children, cast the illegal immigrant as the under-dog in an unfair fight. Clearly the Palyam escorts encouraged resistance for the publicity value, but only to a point which would not endanger their ship or the lives of the immigrants. The bigger the ship and the numbers who sailed, the greater the publicity value when the ship was intercepted.

It is not unreasonable to speculate whether plans to beach these larger ships on the shores of Palestine were ever a practical proposition, given the difficulty of disembarking and secreting away such a large number of passengers in the likely presence of British soldiers waiting on shore. It is noteworthy that those very few ships which successfully reached shore and disembarked their passengers out of sight of the British, were the smaller ships with only a few hundred illegal immigrants on board. Thus the question as to whether a ship of the size of the President Warfield was seriously intended to be beached is an intriguing one.

The Mossad was certainly aware that British surveillance had been continuous ever since she left the USA and that therefore there was no possibility of escaping detection by the Palestine Naval Patrol once she approached territorial waters. On the other hand, the ship had exceptionally powerful engines and, once in territorial waters

³⁸ TNA, ADM1 23526, Letter from G.C.B. Dodds of the Military Branch of the Admiralty to John Beith at the Foreign Office, 8.12.47.

could have attempted to out-distance the destroyers in a fast dash for the shore, where her flat bottom would have facilitated an easy beaching.

The question of the true intent of illegal immigration is addressed directly by Idith Zertal. In discussing the Exodus affair, Zertal develops a thesis that illegal immigration was both an exploitation of the immigrants and a carefully arranged propaganda stunt. She asserts that the attempt to break through the naval blockade off the coast of Palestine was “not even the main goal of illegal immigration”³⁹ and that furthermore “the Zionists had never intended to actually bring the 4,500 refugees onto the shores of Palestine, and such an effort had no chance of success since the Exodus was a show project from its inception.”⁴⁰

Such a conclusion, if true, would reflect very negatively on Mossad. To encourage violent resistance when at the same time it counted on the Exodus, like most previous ships, being intercepted and brought into Haifa would have been a cynical exercise indeed. To do so deliberately to obtain the full glare of world publicity in the presence of the UNSCOP team would be even more questionable. There is, according to Idith Zertal, strong evidence to suggest that the timing of the departure of the President Warfield was not fortuitous, but was linked to the presence in Palestine at the time of the UNSCOP enquiry team. Indeed a contemporary newspaper account reported that the Haganah had announced its determination to bring in a ship during UNSCOP’s presence in Palestine. As it was, it arrived just days before their departure.⁴¹

As the Exodus approached the shores of Palestine, instructions had been transmitted by the Mossad in the Yishuv to the Palyam escorts as to how to convey the plight of the immigrants to UNSCOP representatives on shore.⁴² In the event, the Jewish Agency managed to persuade Emil Sandstrom, the Swedish chairman of the committee, to at least watch the trans-shipment of the immigrants to prison ships in Haifa.⁴³

Most historical accounts speak of the determination by the American crew to keep the ship directed towards Palestine, despite being intercepted and rammed continuously, fourteen miles outside the territorial water limits. Added to this, the

³⁹ Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 170.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴¹ *New York Herald Tribune (European Edition)*, 18.7.47.

⁴² Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 56.

⁴³ *New York Herald Tribune (European Edition)*, 19.7.47.

fact that organised groups of immigrants and the crew constantly tried to prevent the British from gaining a toe-hold on the ship and from entering the wheelhouse, makes it less than conceivable that all this was staged purely to meet the propaganda needs of the Mossad on shore. In addition there is the eye-witness report of John Stanley Grauer, correspondent of The Churchman, who was serving as a volunteer member of the crew. When interviewed, he stated that the intention had been to beach the boat in the early hours of the morning, but that at 3 am British destroyers came up and rammed the ship, making this task impossible.⁴⁴

The violent death of the American Second Mate, Bill Bernstein and two young immigrants, as well as more than 200 injured, attests to the level of sustained and violent resistance put up against the British sailors. Also, given the Palyam commander Yossi Harel's known consideration for the safety of his immigrant charges on board, it is equally illogical that he would have gone through such a dangerous charade, knowing full well that a successful beaching was out of the question. In any event, he had the example of the successful beaching of the Ulua near Haifa, a few months previously with one thousand immigrants on board, as an indication of what could be achieved. The fact that the Ulua's immigrants were all captured and transferred to Cyprus does not necessarily detract from the original intent of a quick dispersal of all those on board once a landing had been achieved.

In this instance, one feels that Zertal has overstated her thesis that illegal immigration was primarily a propaganda exercise mounted by a non-compassionate Ben Gurion and without regard for the safety or the real needs of the immigrants.⁴⁵ This unusually categorical assertion is well out of kilter with the otherwise analytical and insightful appreciation of the subject, which she constantly displays in her book.

In his own book, Zeev Mankovitz takes Zertal lightly to task by asserting that treating Holocaust survivors purely as victims of history, was misleading.⁴⁶ He strongly disagrees that, weakened by the privations they had endured, they did not have minds of their own, were unable alone to find their own way out of the DP camps and were therefore putty in the hands of Zionist emissaries. In his view this took no account of what these survivors had already achieved by their own efforts

⁴⁴ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 19.7.47

⁴⁵ Zertal, Catastrophe, 13 and 219.

⁴⁶ Mankowitz, 295/297.

and it diminished their stature as human beings. To him illegal immigration was a shared burden between the Mossad's emissaries and the survivors. Without this merger of distinct but interlocking interests, the whole project of bringing the survivors to Palestine had no hope of success.⁴⁷

Such moderate criticism is overshadowed by a real broadside aimed at her by Elihu Bergman, who was involved with Aliyah Bet as a crew member on the Tirat Zvi in April 1948. In a review article on her book, Bergman's central issue is that Zertal, "by her own admission" was predisposed from the outset to find the Zionist establishment in the Yishuv guilty of exploiting the She'erit Hapletah as a means to Jewish statehood.⁴⁸ Clearly labelling Zertal among the "new historians" and "revisionist historians" who had in recent years emerged in Israel, he castigates her interpretation of the factual information and, more pedantically, disputes the accuracy of small points of detail, which in no way can be said to detract from Zertal's scholarly treatment of the subject. However he does comment favourably on her use of factual and archival material as an "impressive piece of historical writing."⁴⁹ Those compliments aside, the main thrust of his accusation against Zertal is that of bias against the Zionist establishment and the 'elite' represented by the kibbutz and labour movements, the Haganah, Palyam, Mossad, Ben Gurion, Yigal Allon, Shaul Meirov, etc. Another equally damning assertion by Bergman refers to Zertal's characterisation of the main players in illegal immigration as reflecting subjective judgements and that she substitutes name-calling for serious historical analysis.⁵⁰ He concluded "The Exodus account provides another example of how Zertal mixes bias with fact."⁵¹

In reality, Zertal argues that after 50 years it was time for different perspectives on the subject to be explored. In particular the necessity to strip Aliyah Bet of its Zionist mythology and to recognise that the campaign had other motives such as using the propaganda effect of violent resistance to advance the call for unlimited immigration. She also asserts that Ben Gurion saw the ultimate effect of the

⁴⁷ Mankowitz, 295/297.

⁴⁸ Elihu Bergman, "Israel: Born in Sin?" in *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 7, No1, Autumn (London, 2000), 121.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

campaign as advancing Jewish sovereignty over Palestine and, in so doing, fortifying his own political base.⁵²

Given the body of evidence presented in previous chapters, one would find it difficult to disagree with Zertal's interpretation of the Realpolitik behind Aliyah Bet. The Zionist leaders in the Yishuv were pragmatic individuals who had to overcome their inherent powerlessness in the face of a colonial power. Neither Mankowitz nor Bergman should have been all that surprised that inevitably there was also a more dispassionate or callous side which emerged in the course of the campaign.

Aviva Halamish, who also takes an opposite view to Zertal repudiates the contention that, in the case of the President Warfield, many pregnant women and children were taken on board purely to increase the dramatic effect. In her view, the mixed bag of immigrants was due more to circumstances in the DP Camps than to a carefully thought out programme.⁵³ However in a report provided by a French member of the Haganah, special attention was drawn to the existence of hundreds of women well-advanced in their pregnancy, which he considered was an onerous responsibility for the escorts on board. He suggested applying better selectivity to such women before allowing them to leave Germany.⁵⁴

Tom Segev voiced scepticism about Halamish's views but also about illegal immigration in general. In his view its only inherent benefit lay in its actual existence as a strategic weapon to achieve the creation of a Jewish state. Taking a controversial, but nevertheless arguable, position he contended that "The illegal operation did not... bring the Yishuv many more people than would have come legally; from that point of view it was futile".⁵⁵

For Arie Kochavi there were "no clear winners in the struggle over Jewish immigration." However he recognised that world-wide coverage of British actions against the ships kept international attention on the Jewish DP problem, which otherwise was in danger of waning. He makes the point that the fact that thousands of DPs attempted the journey to Palestine was in itself a considerable achievement. World opinion was thus made aware how the DPs predicament and the question of Palestine were inextricably interlinked.⁵⁶

⁵² Zertal, *Catastrophe*, 14.

⁵³ Halamish, 45.

⁵⁴ Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files, Unsigned report dated 20th July 1947.

⁵⁵ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million* (New York, 1991), 131/132.

⁵⁶ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 85.

These academic debates in Israel over the issue of Zionist propaganda indicate how illegal immigration moved in the historiography from its initial glorification to a more balanced view of its true purpose and achievement.

Turning now to the broader public relations dimension of the Exodus Affair, this clearly reached unprecedented levels, with each party in the conflict concerned to portray its image in the most favourable light. From the moment that the Exodus was intercepted outside Palestine territorial waters in July 1947 until the arrival of her passengers in Hamburg in September, both the Zionists and the British were aware of the importance attached to the presentational aspects of their respective viewpoints to the world's press.

After the trans-shipment of the Exodus passengers to the three British prison ships for their onward journey to France, Bevin saw an opportunity to counter the negative image for the British that newsreel film of the arrival of the Exodus in Haifa had created around the world. In a revealing memo to the Paris Embassy he wrote

The fact that Mr. Bidault personally agreed to return the passengers and we are actually returning them must not, repeat not, be disclosed until you receive further instructions. If the French Government refuses to accept them they may yet have to be returned back to Cyprus. You may however allow your press attachés to make use of the information in paras 2 and 3 above. They should stress the inhumanity of the Jewish organisers in their gross overcrowding of the President Warfield... If this incident provokes sufficient interest we shall make it an occasion for the maximum publicity possible by the BBC ...⁵⁷

Unfortunately for Bevin, one negative image followed another, as the passengers on the prison ships refused, over a period of three weeks, to disembark in Port-de-Bouc and the French would not permit force to be used.

With regard to press comment on the Affair in France, it should first be noted that with the disappearance of extreme right wing newspapers after the war, public opinion was largely guided by papers created at the Liberation. Thus national papers like Combat, Franc-Tireur and Libération, imbued with the spirit of the resistance, all quickly espoused the Zionist cause.⁵⁸ Others such as Le Monde (Liberal) and L'Aurore (Virulently anti-Communist and Gaullist) were more measured, but nevertheless criticised British policy. It was felt that British public opinion was too

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 188/595A, Swedish Legation files, Bevin to Paris Embassy, 19.7.47.

insular and that because, unlike the French, they had no experience of the suffering of the Jews or those in the Resistance, they could not empathise with the plight of thousands of DPs some two years after the end of the war.⁵⁹

A reporter from L'Aurore who managed to hire a small boat to approach the Runnymede Park commented

As you approach you perceive something like a lobster-basket, from which hands appear to acknowledge our calls. Imagine under the blue sky of the Mediterranean, a narrow prison where lie 1,500 naked men and women, who wished to live in freedom in the land of their faith. Have the British understood this? The obstinacy of the Jews has clearly upset them... Are the immigrants going to be forced to disembark at the end of a bayonet? The problem is a delicate one for France, which above all wishes to show itself a hospitable country.⁶⁰

The mouthpiece of the French Socialist Party (SFIO), Le Populaire, of which the former Prime Minister, Léon Blum, was the political director, no doubt expressed the unofficial views of the Socialist Ministers within the Cabinet. These, whilst opposed to the terrorist activities of the Irgun, regretted that the British had refused a request from UNSCOP to commute the death sentences on three young Jews who earlier had attacked the Acre prison.⁶¹

When later in July the passengers of the Exodus were on their way back to France, the newspaper stated that despite the change in British tactics, France would not employ methods such as the use of force which were contrary to all its traditions. France would welcome them, but would not force them to disembark. Reflecting the sentiments of other French newspapers, Le Populaire emphasised that the idea of again incarcerating the "Jewish survivors of Hitler" was pure anathema. Humane solutions had to be found to the problem of Palestine and of the Jewish DPs.⁶²

During the following month, Léon Blum himself was so moved by the plight of the Exodus passengers that he devoted three leading articles to the subject. He addressed himself directly to his friends in the Labour Government, calling on them to act with greater wisdom, to recognise that their policy in respect of the immigrants was "outraging the universal conscience." Such a spectacle was "unbearable, heart

⁵⁸ Zertal, « Le Cinquième Côté du Triangle », 419.

⁵⁹ Le Monde, 26.8.47.

⁶⁰ L'Aurore, 29-30.7.47.

⁶¹ Le Populaire, 15.7.47.

rending and intolerable.” He begged his English friends to think again. They had come up against an unanimous and adverse public opinion. Everybody knew that the passengers would not disembark voluntarily. So did the British authorities. It was time for them to decide where they were to be taken. Then the boats could leave with their unfortunate and heroic cargo. It was also time for the United Nations to come to a decision.

In his third article, Blum took time off to answer the Manchester Guardian which, stung by his previous articles, had pointedly questioned his views on the matter of Palestine. In his reply he started off by disclaiming that he was in any way the spokesman of the Zionists and that he only spoke on behalf of the French Socialist Party.⁶³ In this way he politely rejected any question of partisanship because of his Jewish origins.

To add to the embarrassment of the Labour Government, Harold Laski, then Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Labour Party, used the columns of Le Populaire to express his congratulations to the French Government for its courage in its noble refusal to force the Jewish refugees to disembark in Port-de-Bouc, despite the pressures from London. Having, as he put it, committed a grave error at the start of its new administration in dealing with the Palestine problem, Laski suggested that the [British] Socialist Government would be well advised to start off again by recognising its errors, rather than camouflaging the results and trying to make the French people an accomplice in its injustices.⁶⁴

The local regional newspaper La Marseillaise (Communist) also fell within the category of those newspapers which totally disapproved of the British action. Interspersed with reports from Palestine of the hanging of the three young members of the Irgun and of the subsequent reprisal culminating in the hanging of two British sergeants, the paper’s reporter concentrated his venom on the British. Under the headline “I saw human beings kept like animals aboard the Runnymede Park”, he characterised the ship as a “Floating Auschwitz”. This followed a boat-trip out into the harbour to view conditions on board from some distance away. Referring to the

⁶² Le Populaire, 24.7.47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1.8.47 and 9.8.47

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.8.47.

children, women and old men he could see through the wire of the cages he commented that all right-thinking people would be revolted by such a spectacle.⁶⁵

The bad press that the British Government was receiving in French and American newspapers over the Affair was sufficiently exasperating for Creech Jones to complain in the House of Commons that “malicious vilifications... had not made their [i.e. the Government’s] task any easier.”⁶⁶ This was followed up by a meeting between the British Ambassador and the Secretary General of the MAE, in which Duff Cooper asked for his intervention so that British intentions were not “systematically misconstrued in the French press.”⁶⁷

The British Government aware that it risked losing the public relations battle, made a last effort to explain its position to the world at large. In a press statement issued on 21st August 1947 it warned that, failing any change, the immigrants were about to be taken to the British zone in Germany where they could safely be disembarked. It sought to justify its actions on a number of counts:

1. That the French Government had originally agreed to the return of the immigrants to France.
2. That the immigrants had boarded with false papers and that the Exodus had left port without authorisation.
3. That the Jewish Agency could have used its influence to encourage the immigrants to land in France but chose to act otherwise.
4. That pending a decision of the United Nations on the future of Palestine, nothing should be done to prejudice the outcome. In particular the question of immigration was a major issue and HM Government could not vary the present entry quota of 1,500 per month.
5. The practice of transferring illegal immigrants to Cyprus only encouraged the organisers of the illegal traffic.
6. There were still in Germany thousands of Jews who could have been admitted legally to Palestine, were it not for the flow of illegal immigration.⁶⁸

The effect of the British decision on the Yishuv was one of extreme shock. It was felt that this could only increase the sense of humiliation, not to say impotence, of the more moderate elements. Most of the Hebrew press joined in sharp attacks on Bevin’s ultimatum. Even Ha’Aretz, Dr. Weizmann’s mouthpiece, decried “the crime

⁶⁵ La Marseillaise, 1947.

⁶⁶ New York Herald Tribune, (European Edition), 12.8.47.

⁶⁷ Lazard, 92.

⁶⁸ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/BOUC/3. Text in French of press statement released in London by British Government on 21.8.47.

which will remain engraved in the memory of mankind, the return of the survivors of Nazi massacres to the slaughterhouse itself.”

Fearing an extremist backlash, one moderate Jewish leader remarked, with a certain irony: “Mr. Bevin has asked for trouble and the dissidents [Irgun and Stern Group] who easily match Mr. Bevin in lunacy and stubbornness, will certainly not disappoint him”. Even in the Palestine government, which was not involved in the events at Port-de-Bouc, a number of officials considered Bevin’s step a major political blunder.⁶⁹

The Affair was possibly the event which brought Britain’s public image in relation to Palestine and illegal immigration to its lowest point. Within weeks however attention moved to the United Nations Assembly where Britain’s role in Palestine was speedily to be brought to an ignominious end.

The glare of publicity created by the Exodus Affair also had its downside. Firstly it compromised the Mossad’s clandestine network and its connections with the highest levels of government.⁷⁰ Secondly, the Mossad had to keep a very low profile, so as not to embarrass the French Government any further.⁷¹ There are, however, indications that the ensuing moratorium on immigration activities was also exercised because of the discussions on partition then proceeding at the United Nations.⁷²

One could also surmise that the level of injuries and fatalities on the Exodus also caused the Palyam Commander on board, Yossi Harel, to reflect seriously whether the results of violent resistance to the Royal Navy served any purpose. He had already expressed his misgivings to a gathering of Zionist leaders in November 1946, following the seizure of another boat which had been under his command. He stated that in view of the fatality and dozens of injured which occurred on the Knesset Israel, the overall safety of the ship’s passengers must always be considered paramount. In Harel’s own words “We are not fighting to kill the British but to save Jews.”⁷³ If the Palmach wished to confront the British then the place to do so was on the shores of Palestine, rather than using well motivated but ill-equipped immigrants in dangerous confrontations at sea. In addition Harel complained that, whilst the

⁶⁹ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 22.8.47.

⁷⁰ Frédérique Schillo, La France et la Création de l’Etat d’Israël : 18 février 1947-11 mai 1949 (Paris, 1997), 50.

⁷¹ Hadari, Second Exodus, 158.

⁷² Hadari, Voyage to Freedom, 79.

⁷³ Kaniuk, 68.

immigrants were battling the British on board the Kneset Israel, then docked in Haifa, there was no demonstration or intervention by the Yishuv to prevent the transshipment of the immigrants onto boats for Cyprus.⁷⁴ Furthermore, on board ship, he was often faced with contradictory and confusing instructions transmitted by both the Mossad and the Palmach headquarters.⁷⁵ Such sentiments and criticisms, however, did not necessarily provoke a positive response from his chiefs in Palestine.

A definition of the Mossad's and the Palmach's respective responsibilities for Aliyah Bet is not easily achieved given their overlapping functions and their uneasy political relationship. In simple terms, however, whereas the Mossad involved itself in providing the ships, refurbishing them, stocking them with supplies and selecting the ports of departure, the Palmach escorted the immigrants on board, allocated their berths and looked after their needs during the journey. They were also responsible for discipline on board and training the teams who would be called upon to resist the British Navy when an attempted boarding took place. On land as well as at sea they provided the radio operators who maintained contact with the Mossad headquarters in Paris and Tel Aviv. Once at sea, the primary responsibility for bringing the ship to Palestine lay with a Mossad-appointed overall commander to whom both the ship's captain and the Palmach commander reported.

It is misleading to imply, as Liebreich unfortunately does, that because of the different backgrounds of the Mossad and Palmach people and their different political affiliations (the Palmach's patrons were the Mapam party, whilst those of the Mossad were from Mapai) that their approach to Aliyah Bet was different.⁷⁶ It is equally gratuitous to assert that, because the Palmach escorts were generally young, born in Palestine and militarily trained, that they had more of a propensity to confront the British than the Mossad emissaries, with their European backgrounds, who allegedly had more of a tendency towards conspiracy, moderation and an abhorrence of violence.⁷⁷

The basic reality is that both partners in the Aliyah Bet enterprise shared the dual objective of getting Jews to Palestine, whilst at the same time seeking to obtain the most publicity out of the event. They believed there was no better way to influence world public opinion than the distressing sight of immigrants being

⁷⁴ Kaniuk, 149.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁷⁶ Liebreich, 249.

hauled off illegal ships, which bore all the signs of a fierce battle at sea before their arrival in Haifa. That said, it is acknowledged that there was continuous and sometimes acrimonious debate on the best methods to be adopted. As to the question of the level of resistance to be offered, Liebreich is correct in asserting that this was left to the discretion of the Mossad commander, as the case of the Pan ships will demonstrate.⁷⁸

The sailing of the Pan ships from Burgas in December 1947 was preceded by weeks of debate within the Mossad and between the Mossad and the Jewish Agency as to whether the time and the political environment were ripe for the ships to sail to Palestine with over 15,000 illegal immigrants on board.⁷⁹ In addition, Harel, now having experienced the fatalities and injuries among the immigrants on both the Kneset Israel and the Exodus, decided to confront Shaul Meirov in order to establish the rules of engagement. In the case of the Exodus, as the ultimate commander on board, he had relied on his own assessment of the situation. He had brought confrontation with the British to an end when he considered that further ramming by the destroyers would imperil the ship and that the level of injuries sustained was too high. For this he later had to suffer the recriminations of his colleagues in the Mossad and elsewhere.⁸⁰ If he was to encourage the immigrants to resist British boarding parties again, he wanted a clear and unambiguous order from the Mossad. In his own heart he felt that such an order would be a mistake. Harel's own words, as later related to Kaniuk, express vividly the conflict he faced as between carrying out orders as a soldier and his overriding responsibility for the lives of the immigrants in his charge

Our war is to bring them [the immigrants] to the country [Palestine], not to turn them into soldiers in a lost battle. We do not have the right to turn them into the elite forces of the State-to-be, because this State-to-be is precisely the home which they need.

They no longer believe in anything, they are exhausted by years of trailing around and of betrayal. We do not have the right... Once the 15,000 [from the Pan ships] will have crossed the Mediterranean, we can say that they have forced the blockade. The crossing will itself be the guarantee that they are on their way to the country [even if this lay via Cyprus], and that

⁷⁷ Liebreich, 181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Hadari, *Voyage to Freedom*, 3.

⁸⁰ Alan Tyler, "The Exodus still makes waves" in *Manna: The Voice of Modern Judaism*, (London, Spring, 1998), 5.

will be our victory. This is what our war is all about. Each Jew that survives intact will be our reward.

Meirov, reflecting on his own share of responsibility for the sinking of the Patria back in 1940 with the loss of 267 lives,⁸¹ tacitly acknowledged that the immigrants should never be exposed to unnecessary risks.⁸² Nevertheless after the sinking of the Patria, he did not feel remorse. He commented to one of his subordinates at the time "People like us had no other way to operate. Despite all the terrible, fierce pain over the victims... our political, moral right was drawn from our absolute recognition that we had no other way of fighting the war of immigration and freedom... not that we were happy about these methods... The responsibility falls on the enemy regime [i.e the British]."⁸³

Another ongoing issue revolved around the size of boats to be used. Harel and Meirov were in favour of using large boats in order to "save the largest possible number of immigrants in the shortest possible time." Others such as Yehuda Arazi, of La Spezia fame, and even Ben Gurion were more in favour of a continuous stream of small boats which were more likely to evade British surveillance and make successful landings because of their sheer numbers. In the end the proponents for the large boats won the day.⁸⁴

7.3 The political dimensions of the Affair

It would appear that, in applying Refoulement, Bevin was relying on verbal assurances given to him by Bidault that if the immigrants were returned to France they would be disembarked and returned to Germany. However Bevin remained sceptical as to whether Bidault would be able to carry the French Cabinet with him and indeed whether the "refoulement policy" would indeed work.⁸⁵

A Foreign Office spokesman announced on 21st July, very prematurely as it turned out, that France had agreed to the return of the immigrants. He indicated that there were two reasons for choosing France rather than Cyprus. Firstly Cyprus was overcrowded. Secondly the more vigorous policy was to put future illegal

⁸¹ Kaniuk 76; Hadari, Voyage to Freedom, 85. In order to prevent its use by the British in deporting Jews to Mauritius, Meirov had ordered that the boat be disabled by explosives.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 234.

⁸³ Zertal, Catastrophe, 181.

⁸⁴ Kaniuk, 155; Hadari, Voyage to Freedom, 78.

⁸⁵ TNA, FO 188/595A, Memo from Bevin to Paris Embassy, 19.7.47.

immigrants on notice that they could no longer rely on being sent to Cyprus and from there being slowly filtered into Palestine. In Jerusalem however this news was kept from the local population and a dusk to dawn curfew imposed to prevent violence when it eventually filtered through. A curfew was also imposed on Haifa, after the Haganah attacked two naval radar stations on Mount Carmel in order to prevent further interceptions at sea.⁸⁶ The following day, Creech Jones told the House of Commons that Great Britain was not concerned with what happened to the 4,500 Exodus immigrants. It was, he declared, a matter entirely for the French authorities.⁸⁷

The political objectives sought in the Exodus Affair were reflected in the extensive efforts of both the Mossad and Zionist groups in France to exercise their presence at Port-de-Bouc when the three prison ships dropped anchor in the bay. The first task was to get into contact with the Palyam leadership on board so as to bolster the resolve of the DPs not to disembark voluntarily on French soil. This gambit with the risks to health which it involved was intended to call the British bluff and force a return to Palestine or, at worse, Cyprus. The Mossad worked with both the Minister of the Interior, Edouard Depreux and its own operatives to arrive at this goal.

Depreux, who had secretly encouraged the departure of the President Warfield some 12 days before, now convinced the Cabinet at a meeting held on 23rd July 1947 at Rambouillet, the Prime Minister's summer residence, of the firm line to be taken with the British when their prison ships arrived off Port-de-Bouc. Bidault, aware that the British would press for the return to France of the passengers, had already taken the unusual step of asking Duff Cooper to meet him in Rambouillet for a discussion prior to the deliberations on the topic by the Cabinet.

Duff Cooper reported later that day to the Foreign Office that Bidault, having come out of the Cabinet meeting especially to meet him, had felt that it was the height of madness for the French Government to give the British so much trouble over this matter when so many things of greater importance were being considered. He attributed the attitude of his Socialist colleagues, especially that of the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Transport to the influence of Mr. Blum.⁸⁸

Bidault had effectively found a pretext to disguise his own inability to meet his commitment to Bevin by placing the blame squarely on the Socialist faction within

⁸⁶ *New York Herald Tribune (European Edition)*, 21.7.47

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.7.47.

⁸⁸ TNA, CO 537 Duff Cooper to Foreign Office, 23.7.47.

the coalition. At a later appearance before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the National Assembly, Bidault declared: "It is clear that in this affair [of the Exodus], I say it frankly, French generosity has gone too far. I am not in a position to give any explanations as to the surveillance of the ports. This is outside of my control".⁸⁹

Within the confines of the MAE, the Secretary General, Chauvel, also vented his frustration at the turn of events. Besides neither satisfying the Jews nor the Arabs, he foresaw a major diplomatic incident with the British at a time when France needed them to resolve its major issues concerning Germany. In his view the only way to make amends for the "scandalous" default of allowing the embarkation of the immigrants in the first place, was for France to permit their return to French soil. He was amazed that certain people in positions of authority were "as stupid" as to maintain a contrary position, in the face of the law and France's international obligations. He characterised the Zionist sympathies of certain members of the government [obviously referring to Depreux and Moch] as sabotaging French policy at a time when major issues were at stake.⁹⁰

Two Cabinet meetings were held to discuss the Government's attitude to the return of the Exodus immigrants. Bousquet on behalf of the MAE stated that 4,500 individual visas, alleged to have been issued by the Columbian Consul General in Marseilles, were forgeries issued by one or other Jewish organisation. Equally the letter of the Consul General, previously referred to, was a forgery. Consequently, as the Government had to take responsibility, it would have to respond favourably to the British request for the immigrants to be readmitted into France. Boursicot, the head of the Sûreté, representing Depreux, responded that without using force, the police would be unable to return the 4,500 immigrants to Germany and Austria. In the present circumstances the Ministry of the Interior was not prepared to take on such a responsibility. Having checked with one of the Jewish welfare organisations, the OSE, it appeared that the immigrants would refuse to leave the British boats. On the basis of this revelation, Depreux, later in the day, officially confirmed that he would not allow a [forced] disembarkation from the three English boats.⁹¹ Depreux, as the Minister in Charge, then gave precise instructions to the Préfet of the Bouches-du-Rhône that the liberty of choice of the DPs was to be respected. In other words no

⁸⁹ Moine. This refers to the session of the Commission on 9.8.47.

⁹⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Note du Secrétariat Général MAE, 22.7.47

forced disembarkation would be allowed. Port-de-Bouc was chosen in preference to the better amenities in Marseilles, specifically to isolate any incidents that might occur after the arrival of the ships.⁹²

In view of André Blumel's close relationship with the police and Jewish circles, he was specifically appointed by Depreux to establish contact with the DPs and the various Jewish organisations. He was to be part of a commission constituted by the Government and made up of officials from the MAE, the Interior Ministry and the Public Works Ministry, who would board each one of the three ships.⁹³ By placing the MAE in a junior position, Depreux clearly intended to ensure that his officials as well as those of Jules Moch, maintained complete control of the situation vis à vis the British and thwarted any possibility of disembarkation by force. On 25th July, Nahum Goldman of the Jewish Agency Executive and Marc Jarblum, President of the French Zionist Organisation called on Edouard Depreux, to thank him for the position taken by the Government and asked him to do everything possible to prevent the British from forcibly disembarking the Jews on French soil.⁹⁴

A few years after the creation of the State of Israel and in belated response to an invitation from Israel's representative, Maurice Fischer, issued in May 1948, Edouard Depreux and his wife visited Israel as guests of the Government. On his return to Paris he related his views of the country to an invited audience. In referring to the Exodus Affair he commented that he refused Bevin's demand to land the immigrants by force on French territory. He also remarked that, faced with the MAE's pleas for action, he adopted their own renowned reputation for procrastination and only responded when the matter was virtually over.⁹⁵ Later in his memoirs, Depreux stated: "The police service that was under my authority facilitated the departure of the President Warfield. In my view we had neither to force its departure nor to forbid it. It was for the immigrants to make the decision, whilst taking into account the risks they ran."⁹⁶

⁹¹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Note de la Direction Générale des Affaires Administratives et Sociales, re: President Warfield, 22.7.47.

⁹² New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 29.7.47.

⁹³ Depreux, 301.

⁹⁴ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 26.7.47.

⁹⁵ Archives of Fondation Nationale des Sciences-Politiques, Fonds Cletta et Daniel Mayer, 1.23 MIA, Impressions d'Israël, Conférence au Club Echos, 27.1.55.

⁹⁶ Depreux, 298.

In addition to delegating André Blumel to meet the immigrants, members of the Mossad such as Veruya Pomerantz and L'Abbé Glasberg, were provided by the Interior Ministry with letters of introduction to the local authorities in Marseilles. It appointed both of them to the Government's welcoming committee and specifically designated Pomerantz as a Yiddish and Hebrew interpreter.⁹⁷ According to Hadari, besides himself another Mossad operative, Chanan Zunborn, also acting as an interpreter managed to join the French delegation permitted by the British to board the prison ships a few days later.⁹⁸

On 28th July 1947, the Mossad itself mobilised both its own operatives and those of Polonski's AJ to travel post haste to Marseilles and organise overt and covert actions. The overt actions were to take the form of mass demonstrations against the British by a contingent of Zionist youth in the presence of the French and international press. They were also to take food to the boats and, if necessary, resist any attempt by the British at forced disembarkation on to French soil.⁹⁹ The purpose of covert action was to extricate the Palestinian escorts and crew of the Exodus, whilst at the same time emboldening the other passengers in their refusal to disembark.

A description of the scene at Port-de-Bouc on 29th July 1947, is encapsulated in the following newspaper report

In Port-de-Bouc, the population of this little town has doubled as France prepares to welcome the deportees. About 1,000 young French Jews, most of them wearing short trousers, rucksacks and blanket rolls have arrived since dawn to lend their moral and if needed physical support. The old maple-shaped esplanade bordering the inlet where the Jews were expected to have been landed was lined with waiting trucks and ambulances. Two companies of blue-uniformed Republican Guards held the crowds back with wire-rope cordons and wooden barriers. White smocked doctors and nurses scurried around. A girls school had been converted into an emergency hospital and feeding station.

The report also stated that statistics on the number of passengers in the three prison ships were provided by the Public Health Director of the Port of Marseilles. They

⁹⁷ Archives Nationales, F7/ 16089, Letters of introduction from la Direction de la Reglementation et des Etrangers, 25.7.47.

⁹⁸ Hadari, HaMossad, 46.

⁹⁹ Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files, Box no2, Report by Arthur Epstein, Toulouse Group 17.8.47.

indicated a total passenger list of 4,389 made up of 1,832 men, 1,602 women and 955 children. Of these some 40 were ill.¹⁰⁰ Compared to the 4,554 immigrants who originally left from Sète on 11th July, one can assume that the difference was accounted for by the deaths on board and those remaining in Haifa because of their injuries.

On 30th July, the French National Assembly voted unanimously a resolution asking Britain to solve urgently and humanely the “tragic affair” of the 4,500 who had refused to land in France. The resolution congratulated Paul Ramadier and his Ministers for their liberal action in refusing to enforce the disembarkation of the homeless Jews.¹⁰¹ A few days later, following a lead given by Marcel Pagès, Depreux wrote to Bidault describing conditions on board the ships and stating that the presence of the British in French territorial waters might have a detrimental effect on French public opinion. He therefore discreetly suggested that the British be encouraged to bring their controversial exercise to a speedy conclusion.¹⁰²

Bidault’s reply concentrated on the serious effect that, according to the French Ambassador in London, the stand-off at Port-de-Bouc, was having on Anglo-French diplomatic relations. It was reported that The Times’ accusation of French bad faith was being supported by ministers in the Foreign Office. In the circumstances, Bidault felt it unwise to put pressure on the British, especially as, in their view, the few immigrants who had already disembarked would lead to a greater movement in the days ahead.¹⁰³

Vincent Auriol, the French President, indicated that because of this cooling-off in Anglo-French relations, Georges Bidault decided not to attend in London at the ceremonies ratifying the Franco-British Alliance, previously signed in Dunkirk in February of that year. Instead diplomatic channels were utilised.¹⁰⁴

The major British complaint, as expressed to L’Aurore’s London correspondent, was that France had made certain commitments in April to the British Government regarding controls on suspected illegal immigrants which it then failed to carry out. Specifically in the case of the Exodus, the British had given the French early warning of its intended destination and still it had been permitted to depart. In

¹⁰⁰ New York Herald Tribune (European Edition), 30.7.47.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.7.47.

¹⁰² Zertal, Catastrophe, 87.

¹⁰³ Archives Nationales F7 /16089, Letter from G. Bidault to Minister of the Interior, 5.8.47.

¹⁰⁴ Vincent Auriol, Journal du Septennat, 6.8.47, 385.

addition, France were now reneging on Bidault's commitment to Bevin that there was no problem with the return of the immigrants to France. In effect it was Edouard Depreux who was in the firing line but Bidault, considered Bevin's most trustworthy ally, had badly let him down and embarrassed him. The crisis was all the more serious because even those British political circles, which normally condemned government policy in Palestine, were outraged by the French stance, which it deemed to be in bad faith.¹⁰⁵

Not prepared to allow these British recriminations to go unanswered, a political commentator wrote to L'Aurore expressing "to his British friends" the thoughts of a great number of Frenchmen, whose admiration for Britain's wartime policies were now diminished by her current policies in Palestine. In one of his more telling jibes, he remarked

We suggest that our former allies bring to mind that since the Liberation, they had for their part, given us cause for more disappointment than enthusiasm The brutal fashion in which, as holders of the Mandate in Palestine, they brought to an end our own Mandate over Syria, and their weak occupation procedures in Germany are not matters that would strengthen an 'Entente' that they needed as much as we do.¹⁰⁶

This moral lecture would indicate that many Frenchmen were still smarting from the alleged British involvement in France's ejection from Lebanon and Syria and the differences of opinion over post-war Germany.

Georges Loinger, now working in Paris for the Mossad, was deputised to drive the eminent priest, L'Abbé Glasberg, down to Port-de-Bouc. One of his tasks was to present the Zionist case to the press. Given the intense heat, Glasberg resorted to giving interviews in his hotel room from the comfort of a cold bath. Loinger, together with Venya Pomerantz and André Blumel, were allowed by the British to board one of the ships and speak to the passengers. Ironically it was Glasberg, the former Jew, who best translated the Yiddish of the passengers for the benefit of the other two. They were all present when the Secretary General of the Préfecture, Collaveri, read out a declaration to the passengers inviting them to disembark if they so wished.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ L'Aurore, 5.8.47.

¹⁰⁶ L'Aurore, Letter from Pierre Loewel to L'Aurore, 6.8.47.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Georges Loinger, 10.11.02.

Printed copies of the declaration in French, Yiddish and Hebrew were then distributed.¹⁰⁸

According to Loinger, the immigrants were told, by messages slipped on board by Haganah members, that if they disembarked the creation of a Jewish state was at risk. Whilst admitting that they were certainly exploited, Loinger pointed out that the immigrants' stoicism and desire to go to Palestine at all costs was the true motivation for their resistance. The presence of large numbers of pregnant women was, he conceded, certainly planned for its publicity effect. "It was a political matter. Everything is fair in love and war. They [The Mossad] contrived a great scoop!"¹⁰⁹

In recognition of Blumel's efforts on behalf of the Exodus immigrants, Shaul Meirov, in a departure from his usual and secretive habits, sent him a short note on 9th August 1947. It read: "It is my pleasure to transmit to you today the congratulations and thanks of the headquarters of the Haganah in Palestine, for your courageous and intrepid activities in respect of the Exodus Affair." In a covering note, also in French, Meirov explained that for understandable reasons, he signed the thank-you letter only with his initials. Despite this precaution, this separate letter was unaccountably signed in full: "S. Meyerov".¹¹⁰

The stand-off between the British and the immigrants on board the three prison ships lasted for over three weeks in the blazing heat of summer. Only some 130 immigrants were taken ashore, 77 of them for reasons of ill-health.¹¹¹ Nevertheless the British officer in charge of the three ships, a Colonel Gregson, was optimistic in the early days that the small trickle of Jews disembarking would grow into a flood.¹¹² He was to be sorely disappointed in this and blamed the failure on both the Zionist propaganda efforts and the complicity of the French authorities who, he alleged, hardened the immigrants into refusing all blandishments. His assessment was largely supported by the RG, who referred to messages concealed in food taken on board, the intervention of Jewish helpers, the presence of Jewish interpreters on French police launches and the use of a loud-speaker mounted on a fishing boat. They also singled

¹⁰⁸ Yad Tabenkin Archives, Polonski files Box no2, Undated notice.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Georges Loinger, 10.11.02.

¹¹⁰ Haganah Archives, Blumel Files, 123/Blumel/2 Letters from Meirov to Blumel, 9.8.47.

¹¹¹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 269.

¹¹² Archives Départementales des BDR 148W185, Préfet BDR to Minister of the Interior, 1.8.47.

out the representatives of the FSJF as being opposed to disembarkation. Finally they listed 19 members of the Haganah identified at Port –de-Bouc.¹¹³

That the Palyam members on board used strong-arm tactics to discourage immigrants from volunteering for disembarkation is referred to in the report of a British naval officer.¹¹⁴ Also Renseignements Généraux reported a fight among the immigrants on the Empire Rival.¹¹⁵ Clearly on the question of disembarkation there was never 100% solidarity.

The announcement on 22nd August that the immigrants had one last opportunity to disembark voluntarily in France or face shipment to Hamburg met, except for six volunteers, with a negative response. According to Renseignements Généraux, the leaders on board as well as the local Jewish leaders in France saw some benefits in the immigrants being taken to the British Zone in Germany. Firstly as conditions in Germany would be worse than they could expect in France, the immigrants would be motivated to insist on their removal to Palestine. Secondly, communications in Germany being easier, the immigrants had a better chance of receiving Entry Certificates into Palestine.¹¹⁶

Before the ships departed, Pomerantz accompanied the representative of the MAE on board the ships. Whilst the latter attempted to encourage the immigrants to disembark, Pomerantz, during his translation, secretly intimated that the Yishuv would endeavour to facilitate their Aliyah as soon as possible.¹¹⁷

On 21st August Duff Cooper had a meeting with Bidault. In his subsequent report to the Foreign Office he indicated that he had previously sent Bidault extracts from a captured diary (presumably from one of the Exodus passengers) which proved the assistance the immigrants had received from the French authorities. Bidault responded that he was not prepared in any way to defend or excuse the actions of the French Government. At the same time he did not wish to provoke a ministerial crisis as in any event, in his opinion, the present Government would survive only until

¹¹³ Archives Départementales des BDR 148W185. Report on immigrants of the Exodus submitted to the Director of the RG, 8.9.47.

¹¹⁴ TNA, ADM1 20684, 2.9.47.

¹¹⁵ Archives Départementales des BDR, 148W185, report on situation at Port-de- Bouc by Renseignements Généraux , 18.8.47.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, RG report, 22.8.47.

¹¹⁷ Hadari, HaMossad, 47.

October. He indicated that he would then, most probably, become Prime Minister.¹¹⁸ It turned out that he was wrong in that assessment.

The following day Duff Cooper had a call from Léon Blum indicating that if the British Government would guarantee that the immigrants at Port-de-Bouc would be allowed to land in Palestine within two to three months, the Jewish Agency would advise them to disembark. Faced with a negative response, Blum then asked him to receive Marc Jarblum on behalf of the French Zionist Federation, which he agreed to do. At a meeting a quarter of an hour later Jarblum mentioned to Bidault the case of the ships in La Spezia (1946 incident) where the British had made a special gesture by allowing over 1000 illegal immigrants to land in Palestine within the monthly quota. He suggested a similar arrangement could be made now for the Exodus immigrants. Duff Cooper, however, had never heard of that agreement and in any event as it was now nearly 5.30 pm, and the ships were about to sail to Germany, he indicated that it was definitely too late. He would nevertheless report the suggestion to his superiors as he was anxious to find a solution.¹¹⁹

The day following the departure of the three prison ships towards Germany, the British Embassy handed a note to Raymond Bousquet, requesting that the French Government welcome back onto its territory the immigrants from the Exodus if and when they were moved out from the British Zone. The response recommended by Bousquet, after a long analysis of the history of the Affair, was that France should only accept those who came voluntarily to France and that this should not be considered a precedent. Whatever the numbers of those who volunteered to re-enter France, they would be treated as part of the existing transit arrangements¹²⁰ (i.e within the revised quota of 19,000) That this request was open knowledge in Zionist circles is suggested by a letter sent by Marc Jarblum to the Interior Minister, Edouard Depreux. The informality of the letter also attests to the degree of close consultation existing at this level between French Zionists and senior Government officials.

I am leaving tomorrow morning for Zurich to attend a meeting of the Directors of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. At the last moment I'm hurrying to ask of you the following: to accept the British demand to

¹¹⁸ TNA, FO 371/61823, Duff Cooper to Foreign Office, 21.8.47.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Duff Cooper to Foreign Office, 22.8.47, 6.55PM. The prison ships set sail for Hamburg at 6 pm on that day.

¹²⁰ Haganah Archives, Blumel files, 123/Blumel/2. Note prepared by Direction Générale des Affaires Administratives et Sociales, 25.8.47.

receive [back] in France the refugees from the Exodus that the British would send to Hamburg, under the following conditions:

1. It must concern only those who would come voluntarily.
2. To receive them on a temporary basis like other refugees in transit.
3. The British Government commits to giving these refugees a certain monthly number of certificates for Palestine, out of the present quota, (let us say: 700 to 1,000).

It seems to me that these conditions are justified and not exaggerated. France has been wonderful in this affair and you personally, my dear Minister, have really reflected the sentiments of the people of France with a rare nobility.

Thank you,
Your devoted M. Jarblum.¹²¹

Depreux answered Jarblum by simply indicating that he had written to the MAE, expressing views similar to those of Jarblum.¹²²

The MAE appeared to have taken up the suggestion, for in early September there were reports of a new French initiative being discussed with the Foreign Office in London. Specifically the French had recently increased the quota of Jewish DPs permitted to transit through France from 8,000 to 19,000, which easily accommodated a return by the Exodus passengers, should they volunteer to do so. The French Government made one essential proviso however and that was that the British guarantee to provide every month thereafter, a certain number of certificates for Palestine.¹²³

That an attempt was then made by the British to encourage those who had been taken to the Poppendorf and Amstau internment camps in the British Zone of Germany to volunteer for repatriation to France is clear from Foreign Office records. However by 28th September the British had to recognise that the attempt, except for three volunteers, had failed dismally.¹²⁴ The new French initiative was consequently still-born.

¹²¹ Archives Nationales, F7/16089, Jarblum to Edouard Depreux, Sunday [undated but clearly in August 1947].

¹²² *Ibid.*, Edouard Depreux to Jarblum, 25.8.47.

¹²³ *Le Monde*, 7.9.47.

¹²⁴ TNA, CO 537/3953, From Lubbecke to Foreign Office, 30.9.47.

7.4 Prologue

In July 1982, a metal plaque was attached to the sea wall at Sète at the point of embarkation of the Exodus passengers. It reads “On 11th July 1947, 4,530 clandestine, resistant immigrants facing the British naval blockade, embarked here on the Exodus '47 assisted by the people of Sète and the regional authorities, in order to build a new life in their ancestral home in Israel.”¹²⁵

At the plaque’s unveiling ceremony delegations from Israel and former members of the French administration were present. Hadari interviewed Stanislas Mangin, previously of the DST and asked him why they had assisted the Mossad. He replied

The French were ashamed of what they had done to the Jews during the Vichy Regime. Above all, we had not forgotten that the British had thrown us out of Syria and Lebanon. I remember receiving clear instructions from the appropriate ministers that we had to help the Haganah, both with arms and ammunition and by getting illegal immigrants to Palestine.¹²⁶

Could there be any better confirmation of French Government complicity in Aliyah Bet than this statement by the Deputy Director of the counter-espionage agency ?

¹²⁵ As recorded on a visit by the author to Sète in August 2003.

¹²⁶ Hadari, Second Exodus, 198/199.

CHAPTER 8 French military aid

The whole subject of France's military aid to the nascent Jewish state in 1948 has for years remained in virtual obscurity and little official documentation has emerged to describe its extent and the underlying objectives of those French ministers involved. Certainly the UN-imposed truce between the Israeli and Arab belligerents, effective from 11th June 1948, which precluded the importation into the area of military manpower and equipment, provided clear legal constraints on the French government. Nevertheless its evident caution was more likely to have been engendered by a concern not to draw the attention of the Arab League to its covert help to Israel.

Recent research into this additional area of French Government complicity in support of Zionist endeavours has underlined the complexities involved in France providing substantial military hardware, whilst at the same time proclaiming support for UN efforts to embargo arms shipments to the belligerents. Even more thought-provoking has been the discovery of a sub-plot, whereby the Irgun, generally opposed to the political flavour of the Provisional Government of the State of Israel, was itself supplied with arms by a French Government Minister, acting on his own initiative. (See 8.2 below).

The narrative set out below, in which French arms were supplied to both entities, was assembled from archival sources, documents graciously supplied by an Israeli journalist and a very informative book written by two investigative journalists. It is not suggested that this provides the complete picture of what took place. Further research is certainly required including access to the records of the French army. An initial attempt in early 2005 to tap this potential source to reveal more substantive evidence of the arms transactions referred to, did not succeed. An application made to the Ministry of Defence received the response that 2026 was the earliest year when the archives of the period would be open to inspection.

In the circumstances, the following collected facts, anecdotes and conclusions are presented, not so much as an attempt to encompass the whole story of French military aid to Israel in 1948, but to emphasise the unbroken continuity of French support for the Zionist endeavour in the immediate post-war period.

8.1 Arms for the Provisional Government of the State of Israel

After the decision in November 1947 to partition Palestine, the French administration's support in facilitating illegal immigration discreetly lapsed as the whole question now moved into a more diplomatic phase centred on the United Nations. The Jewish Agency's priorities also changed and the emphasis was now less on breaching the British blockade than on recruiting Jewish youth in Europe and covertly providing them with Haganah military training in its camps in France and Italy.¹ It was envisaged that as soon as the British fulfilled their declared intention to leave Palestine in May 1948, the new recruits together with the accumulated supplies of light arms would be despatched post haste to the new Jewish State. The hunt was also on for major sources of heavy arms supplies such as artillery, tanks and planes.

Thanks to the efforts of two journalists, Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, a detailed but non-academic account of the 1948 War of Liberation entitled O Jerusalem! has been written. From this and other narratives together with some archival sources it can be shown, with a fair degree of credibility, how Israel acquired heavy weaponry from France as one of a number of suppliers. The disclosures also cover the provision of landing facilities in Corsica which facilitated the trans-shipment to Israel of fighter aircraft to form the nucleus of an air force.

¹ Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers for Israel were grouped under an organisation with the acronym "Machal" (Mitnadvei Choutz l'Aretz). Known as Machalniks they numbered some 4,000 and came from 43 countries. France and its North African possessions accounted for 600 of them. Many were trained in the Grand Arénas camp near Marseilles which had previously accommodated illegal immigrants. See "The Machal Story" by Dr. Jason Fenton-one of the volunteers. www.sabra.net/machal/section 4. Web site last accessed 3.10.05.

Ben Gurion had no illusions that, once the British left Palestine, the Yishuv would face an onslaught from the better-equipped neighbouring Arab States. Consequently, even before the Partition vote at the UN, the Mossad leaders, Shaul Meirov, Ehud Avriel and Yehuda Arazi were given a mission by him to acquire modern weapons wherever possible so that the Haganah could transform itself into a fully equipped army.²

Following the Agency's decision to send Golda Meyerson to raise funds in the United States the Yishuv's purchasing power, previously a constraining factor, was no longer a problem. In January 1948 she set off on a tour of Jewish communities across the country. Spelling out the dangers that the Yishuv would have to face in the anticipated Arab invasion, she managed to raise pledges for fifty million dollars specifically for armaments.³

It was now time to approach the French authorities directly for military supplies. Given the obvious difficulties of any such supplies reaching Palestine whilst it was still under the Mandate discretion, as always, had to be observed. An initial approach was made to Hotchkiss, the arms manufacturer, by a "former French officer."⁴ Information was passed on to the MAE by the French Ministry of Defence in February 1948 that the Haganah wished to obtain artillery equipment to a value of \$1 million, mainly Hotchkiss anti-tank weapons and ammunition. In view of the delicate nature of the request, the verbal opinion of the MAE was sought.⁵

This initial contact was followed up by an official request to the MAE by the Jewish Agency itself for a much larger consignment of arms. It was argued that such supplies would be in conformity with the terms of the UN Partition Resolution which envisaged the arming of a Jewish militia after the end of the British Mandate. The Jewish Agency estimated a total budget of \$26 million, including \$5 million for weapons, \$10 million for

² Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *O Jerusalem!*, (London, 1973), 153. Hereafter Collins and Lapierre.

³ *Ibid.*, 150/151.

⁴ Possibly this was Maurice Fischer, the Jewish Agency representative, who had previously served in the French army in Lebanon.

artillery ammunition and \$3 million for vehicles including tanks. An official in the Afrique-Levant department was quick to note that such a contract was not only advantageous for the French arms industry but also for the treasury, which was short of foreign currency.⁶

Georges Bidault's private papers give no indication as to whether he personally involved himself in the matter. However Vincent Auriol, in his famous diary, notes that at a Cabinet meeting in March 1948, Bidault, in an uncharacteristic change of attitude, reacted positively to a suggestion that the Jewish Agency legally purchase its arms requirements in France, so that it no longer took the risk of the discovery and confiscation of its covert arms caches on French soil.⁷

More significant is the existence of an unsigned memo in the ministerial papers of Robert Schuman at the MAE. The memo addressed to "Monsieur le Ministre" specifically refers to arms supplies to the new State of Israel. Because of its date, namely 5th June 1948, it undoubtedly was originally destined for Bidault as Schuman only took over at the Ministry on 26th July.⁸

The clear objective of the memo was to dissuade Bidault from any formal act of recognition of the new State of Israel. The main reason given was the possibility of trouble from the nineteen million Moslems in France's North African possessions. Other reasons referred to the large French financial investments in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt and the sixty cultural centres which France subsidised in Jerusalem, all of which could be put at risk. The writer expressed the view that there was no doubt the Jewish State would survive and that Jerusalem would come under international control. Therefore a postponement of recognition to a more favourable time was recommended.

⁵ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, Ministère des Forces Armées. Note d'information. Concerne: Cessions d'armes à la Palestine, 6.2.48.

⁶*Ibid.*, Note pour le Ministre, 16.2.48.

⁷ Auriol, *Journal du Septennat*, 151.

⁸ MAE Archives, Cabinet du Ministre, Sous-série R. Schuman, 5.6.48.

He further argued that the covert help, already being given by the MAE, was of far greater use to Israel than any formal recognition. The memo specified that this help took the following form:

1. The cessation of arms deliveries to Lebanon and Syria, despite existing contracts.
2. Pressure on the Swiss and Belgian governments to cease deliveries of arms destined for Arab countries or the Arabs in Palestine.
3. The refusal to grant stop-over facilities to the British for planes destined for Trans-Jordan.
4. Permission given to Air France on the 13th May to fly cargo to Tel Aviv.
5. Help given to assist the transit of planes destined for the new State of Israel through France and adjoining countries.
6. The "Nicaragua contract" worth 641 million francs, details of which were set out in an appendix.⁹

As France could legally only enter into arms contracts on a state-to-state basis, the so-called 'Nicaragua contract' was a subterfuge intended to indicate that the weapons were destined for the Nicaraguan army. In reality the purchasing agent, ostensibly acting for the Nicaraguan Government, was none other than one of the Haganah's arms procurement officers, Yehuda Arazi. Apparently he had obtained his official status, as a roving Nicaraguan Ambassador, on payment of a \$200,000 bribe.¹⁰

⁹ According to the Appendix the "Nicaragua Contract" comprised the following armaments and cost:

First consignment:

5000 x 7.92mm rifles plus 5 million ordinary bullets.
25 000 x Three-bullet and 5000 x five-bullet rifle magazines.
12 x 120mm Brandt mortars type A plus 12,000 mortar shells.

Second Consignment:

50 x 65mm artillery canons plus 50,000 shells.
10 x 75mm artillery canons (1932 model) plus 10,000 shells.
15 x 13.2mm Machine guns plus 300,000 bullets.
200 x 7.5mm sub-machine guns (1924-29 model) plus 3 million bullets.
10 x H.39 [Hotchkiss] tanks plus 10,000 x 37mm shells
and 150,000 x 7.5mm bullets.
1 million x 8mm bullets.
1 million x 6.5mm bullets for Italian rifles.

Total price to be paid in US Dollars: \$ 2,467,191

¹⁰ Collins and Lapierre, 265.

A first consignment of these weapons, including five 65mm canons and 48,000 shells was shipped from France on the SS Borea. The ship was intercepted by the Royal Navy and brought into Haifa on 12th May 1948. There she was guarded by a detachment of British soldiers. On the 15th of May at the expiry of the British Mandate, the control of the ship and its cargo was released back to its captain.¹¹ It would seem that the balance of the weapons, including ten 75mm guns and ten Hotchkiss tanks, reached Israel secretly on a second trip by the Borea on 14th June 1948.¹² There is no doubt that this arms shipment breached the terms of the UN imposed truce of 29th May which came into force a few days earlier. However, from the French point of view, as the ship had left France before the UN embargo came into force, no blame could be attached to France.

Clearly the MAE was always aware that the weapons were destined not for Nicaragua but for the Provisional Government of the State of Israel. From this we can assume that in 1948, for the first time, all the major agencies of Government acted in concert in order to underpin Israel's capacity to overcome any threat from its Arab neighbours. Such an assessment finds support in a June 1948 diary entry by the French President. Vincent Auriol noted that Pierre-Henri Teitgen, the Minister of Defence, informed him, in great secrecy, that to maintain a military balance, weapons had been supplied to the Jews with the agreement of Jules Moch, the Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister, Robert Schuman.¹³

Later in October 1948, four of the ten small French Hotchkiss H.39 tanks saw action on the Egyptian front together with two larger British Cromwell tanks previously stolen from the British army.¹⁴ Other than for a Sherman tank this represented the nucleus of Israel's armoured brigade in the War of Independence.

¹¹ Collins and Lapierre, 393.

¹² *Ibid.*, 545; Ben Gurion Yoman Ha'Milchamah, Volume 2, (The War of Independence Diary), eds., Gershon Rivlin and Elhannan Oren (Tel Aviv, 1983), 519.

¹³ Auriol, 255.

¹⁴ Dan Kurzman, Genesis 1948: The First Arab-Israeli War (New York, 1970), 582; Dr. James Fenton, The Machal Story-Section 4, www.sabra.net/machal/section 4.

Another area where French assistance was crucial was in providing landing and storage facilities for aircraft transporting military supplies to Israel. Jules Moch's revelations in his memoirs leave no doubt as to his personal involvement in this operation as Minister of the Interior at the time. With Government permission, the French island of Corsica was used as a staging post for a variety of American-acquired aircraft flying from the Haganah-controlled base of Zatec in Czechoslovakia to Israel. The Campo dell'Oro air base in Corsica had already been designated for this task even before the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948. Genuinely proud of his own contribution, Moch provides clear details of the subterfuges employed by him to create an air-bridge to Israel

To provide this aid, I nominated trusted men to the airport of Campo dell'Oro near Ajaccio... I arranged for its commander, Désiré Latour, to meet Marc Jarblum, a Polish refugee and Fischer, the future Israeli Ambassador... When consignments arrived for Israel and a plane for its onward transportation, Latour would establish a flight plan to Casablanca... but the relative telegramme would be sent to Lod. Very quickly modern arms containers, supplied by the Czech factory Skoda, before the Communist regime took over, and even from the USSR, converged on Campo dell'Oro. Pilots, American generally, flew the planes chartered by the Jewish Agency. Nearly every night a large cargo plane linked Campo dell'Oro to Lod. There were hundreds of flights without incident. If the secret army of Israel, the Haganah, was so quickly victorious ... it was perhaps because of this organisation.¹⁵

Moch's references to Maurice Fischer and Marc Jarblum, both representatives of the Jewish Agency in Paris are but yet one more example of the depths of the complicity which united French Socialist Ministers with active Zionists.

The supplies from the Czech Skoda Works undoubtedly refer to thirty dismantled Messerschmitt fighter aircraft delivered in crates between May and July 1948. Four of them arrived in Israel on 23rd May 1948 and

¹⁵ Moch, 252/253.

were quickly assembled.¹⁶ Six days later they were flown in action against an Egyptian column threatening Tel Aviv.¹⁷ Other supplies, which transited through the Campo dell'Oro, were the bulk of the arms deal which Ehud Avriel had successfully concluded with the Czech arms manufacturer, Zbrojovka Brno, back in November 1947. In addition to 25,000 rifles, the contract included 5000 machine guns, 175 Howitzers and 58 million rounds of ammunition.¹⁸

An even more interesting example of the ability of Fischer, later to become Israel's first Ambassador to France, to obtain the complicity of the Ministry of Defence can be constructed from a note discovered in his correspondence with Cletta Mayer, the wife of the Minister of Works and Social security. One could speculate that the document, obviously prepared well in advance of the 15th May 1948, reflected Fischer's discussions with the Ministry of Defence as to Israel's immediate needs on independence. Although impossible to confirm that its source is indeed Fischer, as it is untitled, undated, unsigned and on plain paper, the contents indicate that it was a draft plan to deal with the movement of planes and military supplies through France and areas controlled by France to an unspecified destination. The plan envisaged that planes in crates would arrive by plane in Ajaccio or Oran (Algeria) and be reassembled on an adjacent airfield. After a few days the planes would be first flown to Fezzan and from there to Koufra for refuelling. Both locations were French military bases in Libya until 1955. Another part of the plan envisaged the arrival of arms and ammunition in a French port which would then be transported by road to a French airport near Paris controlled by the security services. Following the arrival of bombers and transport aircraft the weapons would then be loaded and the planes depart within 48 hours, presumably for Israel.¹⁹ One could assume that this draft plan referred to the Czech-produced Messerschmitt fighter

¹⁶ Collins and Lapierre, 358.

¹⁷ Israel Defence Forces. IDF: 1948 War of Independence. The first IAF fighter Mission, 29.5.48. www.idf.il. Web site last accessed 3.10.05.

¹⁸ Collins and Lapierre, 358.

¹⁹ Archives de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences-Politiques, Fonds Cletta et Daniel Mayer, 3MA15. Draft plan.

aircraft and the Czech arms supplies, which Israel urgently needed for its defence.

In the event it does not appear that these particular parts of the plan were put into effect since, based on Moch's disclosures, alternative solutions were clearly found.

All these examples of French military assistance to the nascent State of Israel, however covert and discreet, can be seen as a natural adjunct to the aid accorded to the Mossad in its illegal immigration campaign. Certainly those Socialist Ministers who were involved viewed the two acts as one seamless and concerted effort to support the Zionist endeavour. Nevertheless on the matter of France's official recognition of the State of Israel, this appeared to be too premature a step even for President Vincent Auriol.

On 10th August 1948, Cletta Mayer, on her return from Israel, handed Auriol a note from Moshe Shertok, the Israeli Foreign Minister, which noted the Provisional Government's disappointment that France had failed to extend its official recognition. Despite this, Shertok expressed his nation's gratitude for France's assistance. This was unspecified but likely to refer to the arms shipments that the French Government had recently made available. Auriol noted in manuscript in the margins of Shertok's letter that he had told Cletta Mayer that France, for the moment, had to remain prudent. Nevertheless he assured her that the Government was slowly preparing the Moslems of North Africa for the news that recognition of the State of Israel by France would soon be forthcoming.²⁰

8.2 Arms for the Irgun Zvai Leumi

No subject underlines more clearly the basic ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Georges Bidault's policies regarding Palestine than the case of the arms supplies to the Irgun. Having previously and on more than one occasion shown his distaste for illegal immigration activities

²⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds Vincent Auriol, 552AP71. Letter from Moshe Shertok to Auriol, 3.8.48.

out of French ports and the lax attitude of his Socialist Cabinet colleagues to the question of effective visa controls, Bidault, in May 1948, seemed to have undergone a radical conversion in favour of Zionism. But whereas the Government's intention was to provide covert military aid to the Provisional Government of the Jewish State, this was surreptitiously extended by Bidault to its main political rival, the Irgun, a para-military organisation, regarded with ill-concealed contempt by the Socialists in the Government coalition.

Although not strictly an illegal immigrant ship- the *Altalena*, loaded with arms and some 900 volunteers, having left a French port actually after the creation of the State of Israel -the affair does provide yet further evidence of covert French complicity in pro-Zionist activities. However this time the conspirator was neither the Ministry of the Interior nor the Ministry of Public Works and Transport but, surprisingly, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Before discussing how and why this phenomenon came about, one needs first to appreciate the sheer size of the weapons consignment delivered by military convoy to the Irgun's ship, the *Altalena* at Port-de-Bouc on 9th June 1948. According to Irgun sources, it comprised 5000 British Lee-Enfield rifles, 5 million bullets, 250 Bren Guns, 150 German Spandau machine guns and thousands of rocket-grenades. In addition to the above, there were also 5 Bren-gun carriers. After delivery of this first consignment, the *Altalena* was due to return to France to pick up heavier weapons.²¹ In the event, as we will see later, this did not occur.

The story of the *Altalena* is well documented in so far as its arrival in Israel and its subsequent destruction by the forces of the Provisional Government are concerned. However little attention was paid by academics to the identity of the supplier of the weapons it carried and, consequently, Bidault's motivation in agreeing to the deal was not examined at all. At least this was the case until, in 1978, two books each entitled "The

²¹ Yitzhak Ben-Ami, *Years of Wrath, Days of Glory* (New York, 1983), 485.

Altalena” by authors, supposedly on opposite sides of the political spectrum, were published in Israel.

The first by Uri Brenner was published by the left-wing Kibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House at Yad Tabenkin and the second was the work of Schlomo Nakdimon, the senior political commentator for the Israeli evening paper, ‘Yedioth Ahronot’ and was published by one of its offshoots. Unfortunately neither book was ever translated from the Hebrew. As he would himself admit, Schlomo Nakdimon is a great admirer of Menachem Begin, the former leader of the Irgun and later of its political successor the Herut party. He was Begin’s media advisor in the years 1978-80 during the peace talks with Egypt. One might then assume that he would take a right-wing view of the events surrounding the Altalena Affair. In reality, however, in so far as the French connection to the Affair is concerned, namely the supply of arms, his work was meticulous in acquiring verbal testimony from many of the major players in the French Government and the Irgun operatives in Paris at the time.

From an academic standpoint, the major weakness of Nakdimon’s narrative has been the lack of documentary as opposed to anecdotal or oral evidence. This is also the case with Uri Brenner’s book. However, the difficult question which both writers tried to resolve was Georges Bidault’s motivation and, other than proposing a number of speculative scenarios, neither reached any firm conclusion. Part of these weaknesses have now been partially corrected by the recent discovery of a number of documents in the private papers of Georges Bidault now made available at the French National Archives. From these we have for the first time documentary proof of the various steps leading to the arms delivery to the Altalena and the names of those officials from the MAE and the Defence Ministry who were involved. However the documentation did not of itself resolve the question of motivation.

The man at the heart of the Altalena Affair was undoubtedly Schmuël Ariel, the Irgun’s European representative stationed in Paris, described by Schlomo Nakdimon as a “one-man institution”. An extract

from a SHAI (Haganah Intelligence) report provides the following profile of Ariel

Ariel, of Romanian origin, had originally been the cultural officer of the Revisionist party in Romania and published its newspaper. Although married, he did not live a regular family life and was considered a womaniser. He had been involved in gathering the immigrants in a camp for the ill-fated Struma. Having upset the Romanian authorities, he spent some three months in gaol before bribing his way out. He then emigrated to Palestine in 1944, carrying with him a large sum of money and jewellery. Once in Jerusalem he led a very high life and swiftly dissipated his fortune. Through his contacts with the Revisionists he was posted in 1946 as their emissary to France and Belgium.²²

Another side to Ariel was his interest in intelligence work. According to American military intelligence, Ariel approached one of their field operatives in Palestine and offered to set up for the Americans an espionage system in Romania or any Balkan country, by using Jews who were in responsible government positions.²³

Once established in Paris, Ariel whose French was impeccable, gained entry to French political circles through the intermediary of Claire Vaydat. From this position he set out to portray the Irgun as the principal Jewish military force in Palestine. However his greatest achievement came only after the UN's decision on the Partition of Palestine, in November 1947.

The positive vote resulted in wide-scale attacks by Arab gangs in Palestine. Even more than the Haganah, the Irgun's lack of weaponry seriously hampered its military capabilities against the Arabs. The large-scale acquisition of arms then became a priority as the meagre arms caches which the Irgun had assembled in France were all too often discovered by the French police and confiscated. Ariel therefore turned his attention to the MAE, where he felt he could use his persuasive powers to do a deal with the

²² Document supplied by S. Nakdimon, 3.6.04. From SHAI re: Schmucl Lev Ariel- Etsel, 8.3.48.

²³ *Ibid.*, Extract from General Intelligence Report from 400th CIC detachment USAFIME, 14.10.44.

French Government. An opportunity presented itself when, on 5th March 1948, the French Government's UN representative, Alexandre Parodi, made disparaging remarks about the Irgun to the Security Council. Ariel, referring to France as the only country in the world where "the legitimate claims of the Palestinian Resistant" could receive a sympathetic hearing, sought from Bidault an audience in which to express his surprise and disappointment at Parodi's statement.²⁴

On the original of Ariel's letter to Bidault issued on the headed paper of "Assistance aux Déportés et Réfugiés" run by Claire Vaydat, there is an annotation in Bidault's own handwriting that an invitation be issued to Mr. Ariel and Mme Vaydat for a meeting on "Monday at 11am".²⁵ It is interesting to note that by now Claire Vaydat was virtually treated as a pariah by the FSJF. A year earlier she had seriously upset the Joint which was financing the movement of Jews granted temporary visas to France. According to the Joint's Director in Paris, she had, whilst directing the "Assistance aux Déportés et Réfugiés"

disregarded the directives and understandings to which all the Jewish organisations and the Coordinating Committee had been committed. Consequently it was necessary for the Conseil Interoeuvres and for the Federation of Jewish Societies to dispense with her services and to disclaim responsibility for her activities...

There is no official support, nor any sanction or working relationships of any kind with Mme Vaydat and the Assistance aux Réfugiés et Déportés.²⁶

One could speculate that Claire Vaydat's involvement with the organisation of the Irgun illegal immigrant ship, the Ben Hecht (Abril), in March 1947 was at the root of the problem. Certainly the Joint, already very

²⁴ Jabotinski Institute Archives, Personal Papers of Schmuël Ariel, 2/4 -315, Copy of letter sent by Ariel to Bidault, 7.3.48.

²⁵ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124. Original of letter from Ariel to Bidault, 7.3.48.

²⁶ Archives of the AJJDC France-General, 1944-1947, From Irwin Rosen, Director American Joint Distribution Committee, Paris to all JDC immigration offices, 17.5.47. The correct name of the organisation was 'Assistance aux Déportés et Réfugiés'.

careful about its contacts with the Mossad, would have had a great aversion to any involvement with the Irgun, which it considered extremist.

The extending of an invitation to Claire Vaydat also indicates that Bidault was already well acquainted with the lady and with the Revisionists. Indeed in mid-1946, when he was both Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, he had met Samuel Merlin, the General Secretary of the HCNL. Unfortunately, following that meeting, Merlin in an interview with France Soir apparently gave a misleading impression that Bidault favoured the HCNL and was, in all probability, then taken to task by Bidault's office. In November 1946 in a series of letters to Bidault and Georges Gombault, the editor of France Soir, he sought to rectify any slips of the tongue which may have occurred. A few days later Merlin received a letter of thanks from Bidault's office for putting the record straight.²⁷

The meeting with Ariel and Vaydat on 20th March was chaired, not by Bidault but by his "Chargé de Mission" Jacques Boissier.²⁸ According to Ariel, Bidault's response to his letter, as conveyed by Boissier, was couched in friendly terms.²⁹ During the meeting Ariel took the opportunity of raising the possibility of a formal agreement on arms supply between the Irgun and the French Government and the meeting ended on the understanding that Ariel would produce a draft of such an agreement.

It is conceivable that Bidault's previous attitude of strict neutrality concerning French Government policy towards Palestine underwent a radical change after the United Nations had voted on partition and British policy in Palestine was shown to be bankrupt. But why then did Bidault secretly arrange a separate supply of arms to the Irgun knowing, as he must have done, that at virtually the same time other supplies were going directly to the Provisional Government of the State of Israel?

At first sight this separate but hidden deal with the Irgun, appears as a divisive manoeuvre, but such an intent is by no means substantiated. Bidault's later assertions, in an interview with Schlomo Nakdimon that

²⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124, 20.11.46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.3.48

only the Irgun asked him for arms and that he was unaware of the political differences between the Haganah and the Irgun appear, on the other hand, very disingenuous.

Nakdimon sought answers directly from Bidault at an interview at his home on 21st June 1972. It had not been easy to gain access to the man who shortly before had returned from exile in Brazil and Belgium. There he had sought refuge from de Gaulle after siding with the OAS during the crisis over Algerian independence.

In Nakdimon's original letter to Bidault in January 1972, which remained unanswered, he had offered Bidault a number of alternative reasons as to his motivation for supplying arms to the Irgun. These ranged from suggesting that Bidault sought revenge on the Haganah for French embarrassment over the Exodus Affair to the more sensitive accusation that he gave his support to the Irgun in order to exacerbate internal political dissensions within Israel in the interests of the British, the actual suppliers of the arms. One of the other suggestions indicated that Nakdimon was unaware at the time that arms had already been supplied to the Provisional Government.³⁰

In the absence of any reply from Bidault to his letter, or to that of his publisher's follow-up letter, Nakdimon came to Paris in June 1972, intent on interviewing the major players in the Altalena Affair. In this project he was guided by Schmuël Ariel who had remained in Paris throughout most of the intervening period since 1948. He had apparently, because of his anger over the Altalena Affair, declined a post offered to him in the Israeli administration by Ben Gurion himself and returned to France.

Accompanied by an interpreter -Nakdimon did not speak French- he went to Bidault's address a first time, only to be told by his wife, Suzanne, that Bidault was too drunk to receive them. On the 21st June the interview finally took place.³¹ From the French transcript of that interview a

²⁹ Schlomo Nakdimon, *Altalena*, (Jerusalem, 1978), 90.

³⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP187, Shlomo Nakdimon file.

³¹ Interview with Schlomo Nakdimon, Tel Aviv, 3.6.04.

number of interesting assertions, some less convincing than others, were made by Bidault. These are the more interesting ones:

(a) No records would be found in the military archives of the supply of these weapons. Nevertheless the arms could not have been supplied without the complicity of the military.

(b) He was not aware that the arms supplied were British and had no recollection of having put anything in writing about the "Affaire". He had certainly not given an order in writing to General Revers [the COS] to supply arms to the Irgun.

(c) As to how the arms were supplied, Bidault replied: " the explanation is simple , there was here an Ambassador called Ariel... who had got into contact with a member of my office, Mr. Morin... Morin arranged this affair with Ariel and, in substance, I only had to say yes. Morin would not have proposed something to me which I would have refused."...

(d) Because the question of help to Israel was so delicate, the French Government was never informed of this "clandestine affair" and had not been since. Certainly Robert Schuman [the Prime Minister] was not involved. Teitgen, at the Ministry of Defence was possibly involved.

(e) Because France was a "great Moslem power" and there were difficulties in Algeria, the whole affair was treated covertly. Bidault took charge of it, entirely under his responsibility. He arranged for the massive arms delivery, in the absence of official approval, because at the time he was a powerful figure [in Government]. He stated that his only role was to ask for a proposal to help Israel, to which he gave his blessing. It was never debated by the Government, was not publicised and even today the French are completely ignorant of the matter.

(f)The first time he had heard of Etzel [Irgun] was at his meeting in 1948 with Ariel. He did not consider the Irgun as a new force which would permit France to get rid of the Arabs. He, personally, was not conversant with the [political] divisions which separated the various military forces which existed in the country.

(g)In providing weapons to the Irgun, his intention, however irregular and worrying, was to provide Israel with material means, not in order for Israelis to fight among themselves, but only that arms reached Israel. [All, except for Ariel,] other ministers or ambassadors never asked anything of him. "As a consequence," said Bidault "I was now prepared to help Israel, whenever an opportunity presented itself. And so it happened that Ariel made this proposal to me."

(h)The aid given to the Irgun was linked to the security of Lebanon, to maintaining a balance of forces in the Middle East and for reasons of justice. "Something had to be done. If I had been asked by others, they instead would have profited. Only Ariel asked me for something."

(i)He was aware that the Altalena was destroyed by fire but there was nothing he could do about it. In any event he left the Government at the end of June 1948 and spoke to no one about the affair.

At the end of the interview, Nakdimon asked Bidault whether he was still involved in politics. Bidault's ascerbic reply was "Of course I am. What else would you have me do? Write a love story!"³²

Bidault's answers certainly include factual mistakes but he is particularly disingenuous in suggesting that he was unaware of the nature of

³² Document provided by Schlomo Nakdimon, 3.6.04. French transcript of Bidault interview in June 1972.

the opposing forces within the Yishuv. The Afrique-Levant department in the MAE was continuously supplied with information from its Consulat General in Jerusalem as to political events within the Jewish Agency and the respective military strengths of the Haganah, the Irgun and the Stern Group.³³ Furthermore, de la Charrière, of the Consulate, had reported to Paris on his recent contacts with Irgun and Stern group representatives. They were protesting to him against arms seizures and the arrest of their members in France.³⁴

It is probable that the French Consul had a tendency to overestimate the power of the Irgun, as opposed to that of the Haganah. This could have left Bidault with the impression that the Irgun was in a good position to take power after the creation of the State and this certainly was what Ariel wanted him to believe. To suggest however, as Bidault implies, that he had only responded to the Irgun's request for arms because no other faction in Palestine, such as the Haganah, had approached him, is taking credulity too far.

Jean Morin, in a monograph on Ariel, provided some rationale for the arms delivery. Possibly this is the closest one can get to defining at least Morin's motivation to see the deal succeed. Morin's recollections of his first meeting with Ariel on the 15th May 1948 and the actions he took subsequently provide possibly the only succinct account by an official in Bidault's office of the deal with the Irgun.

According to Morin, the essence of Ariel's representations to him was that the Irgun was the strongest military body in Palestine and would eventually take over power. It was therefore in France's interest, particularly in view of its concerns over its North African possessions, to reach an agreement with the Irgun for future cooperation. This would enable France to once again become a great power in the Middle East.

³³ MAE Archives, Sionisme, File 373, Carton 72. Note to Afrique-Levant from Consul General: "The Jewish Agency indicates that the Irgun had 5,000 members and the Stern Group 1,500 members. There had been no movement for two years.", 16.4.47.

³⁴ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP125, Report from de la Charrière, March 1948.

To this end, as a representative of the Irgun for Europe, he was authorised to negotiate in the first instance, an arms deal with the French Government.

Morin recalls that he responded that France could only sign an agreement with a sovereign state and therefore as a prerequisite a government led by the Irgun would have to be in situ. Nevertheless, even in the absence of such a written agreement, he indicated that the French government would secretly supply armaments which had been downgraded by the army but which were still operable. These would be transferred to Port-de-Bouc and loaded onto the Altalena. Bidault, he indicated, had given him the task of obtaining approval for the arms deal from the Prime Minister, Robert Schuman and the Minister of Defence, Pierre-Henri Teitgen. Subsequently, Morin relates, full agreement was reached with the Army Chief of Staff, General Georges Revers, on the details of the shipment. Although the supply of the weapons and their delivery to Port-de-Bouc presented a number of logistical problems, he notes that these were sorted out by Ariel with the help of the DST, the Préfet of the Bouches-du-Rhône and the COS's representatives on the spot. Morin concluded his monograph by suggesting that despite Ariel's self-confidence and exaggerated demands, even he was surprised by the success of the venture. From then on, as he recalls, Ariel felt an obligation to him.³⁵

A copy of the draft agreement previously submitted to Jacques Boissier on 25th March 1948 was handed by Ariel to Morin at their meeting. Basically the agreement provided for the supply of light and heavy weaponry to two Irgun infantry divisions and the provision of a military base on French soil for the training of one of these divisions. In return France would benefit from a "Hebrew Palestine" which would act as a bulwark against the ambitions of the Arab League and would supply France with considerable leverage in the Levant and, by extension, in North Africa.

The receipt of this document had been confirmed by Boissier two days later. He had promised to transmit it to Bidault, "who will no doubt

³⁵ Jean Morin, "Menahig, Adam, Yedidi-Nefesh" in Yalkut Ariel, Ha'ish shel Altalena (Jerusalem, 1994), 68-75.

study it and discuss it with his colleagues.”³⁶ However at some point Boissier seems to have disappeared from the scene and the proposed agreement remained dormant until presented anew to Morin on 15th May, the day which marked the creation of the Jewish State.

Morin’s recollections would tend to indicate that he accepted Ariel’s contention that France would best be served by an Irgun-led government in Israel. Possibly it was on this basis that he convinced Bidault to approve the supply of arms.

However this is not the view of Tsilla Hershco, who suggests that Bidault’s action was primarily intended to embarrass the new Provisional Government dominated by Ben Gurion’s Mapai party. She further states that when Maurice Fischer,³⁷ the first Israeli envoy to France, presented a note of protest in relation to the arms shipment, Bidault used Jean Morin as the scapegoat, and promised that such an incident would not recur.³⁸

The various steps leading up to the departure of the Altalena to Israel on the 11th June 1948 are fairly clear and a detailed chronology can now be presented. This has been achieved through merging a number of corroborating sources including extracts from Ariel’s diary³⁹, Morin’s monograph and a truly significant handwritten, un-signed and undated note in Bidault’s papers headed “Affaire Irgoun.”⁴⁰

The starting point is Ariel’s initial meeting with Boissier on 15th March and the submission of the draft agreement ten days later. There then followed a series of meetings between them during the month of April.

³⁶ Jabotinski Institute Archives, Personal papers of Schmuël Ariel. 214-315.

³⁷ Archives départementales des BDR 148W141. Information note on Maurice Fischer, 12.11.52: “Maurice Fischer, of Belgian nationality was well known to the Special Services of the French army for his wartime service in the Free French army in Lebanon. Under the name of Lieutenant Lavergne he worked in Military Intelligence in Beirut. He was acknowledged to be an expert on the Kurds and his wide-ranging contacts in the Middle East were much appreciated by his superiors.”

³⁸ Hershco, 72.

³⁹ Document provided by Schlomo Nakdimon, 3.6.04.

⁴⁰ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124. Document entitled “Affaire Irgoun”. This so-far unpublished document is possibly the only conclusive and incontrovertible evidence of Bidault’s and the French government’s complicity in the so-called Altalena Affair and is therefore of significant historical importance.

From there the chronology develops with a series of highly significant meetings and arrangements:

4th May: Meeting between Ariel and Boursicot the head of the Sûreté Nationale. [Ariel's diary]

According to Bidault's papers, Boursicot then arranged for Ariel to have a meeting with Jean Chauvel, the General Secretary of the MAE, because at this point Jacques Boissier was no longer available.⁴¹

7th May: Following Ariel's meeting with Jean Chauvel, Jean Morin was delegated by Bidault to enter into discussions with Ariel to assess his demands.⁴²

15th May: First meeting with Jean Morin (Directeur-Adjoint au Cabinet du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères). Having presented an immediate request for military aid, Ariel submitted to Morin a copy of the draft agreement previously sent to Boissier.⁴³ Morin's monograph gives some idea of the discussion that ensued.

17th May: Ariel's second meeting with Morin. [Ariel's diary]
With Bidault's approval Morin then contacted General Georges Revers, the Chief of Staff of the army and they discussed the logistics of the project. Following Revers's acceptance of the task allotted the army, he assigned Major-General Henri Coudraux to liaise with Ariel and discuss his needs. It was envisaged that obsolescent weapons and British weapons would be supplied free of charge and that an arms manufacturer,

⁴¹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP124 "Affaire Irgoun."

⁴² Morin, 68.

⁴³ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault 457AP124 "Affaire Irgoun."

Etablissements Brandt, would be recommended to furnish the Irgun with other material.⁴⁴

21st May: Ariel met Georges Bidault in the presence of Morin. According to Ariel, Bidault is said to have stated that France would supply arms to the Irgun at a rate commensurate with the Irgun's possibilities to transfer them beyond France's frontiers.⁴⁵

24th May: Ariel's second meeting with Georges Bidault. Final instructions were given. [Ariel's diary]
After General Revers' total approval of the logistics of the operation, he requested an order in writing from the Minister of Defence, Pierre-Henri Teitgen. It was after the end of a Cabinet meeting that Teitgen discussed the matter privately with Bidault and they decided to go ahead with the operation, subject to the approval of Schuman, the Prime Minister.⁴⁶

28th May: Ariel met General Revers and later in the day with Roger Wybot the head of the DST. They discussed security arrangements at Marseilles to permit the safe sailing of the Altalena. [Ariel's diary] Wybot subsequently delegated Maurice Cottentin, head of the DST in Marseilles to liaise with Ariel.

4th June: Ariel went to Marseilles in order to deal with all necessary preparations on the spot and to establish contact with the regional security services and military command [Ariel's diary]

1st to 10th June: Preparatory work is carried out by:

⁴⁴ Ets.Brandt were well-known manufacturers of heavy mortars.

⁴⁵ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault 457AP187. Letter from Nakdimon to Bidault, 25.1.72.

⁴⁶ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault 457AP 124, "Affaire Irgoun."

- Major-General Coudraux.
- Pierre Boursicot with the agreement of Jules Moch.
- The Director General of the Customs service.

The armaments are then assembled in the Marseilles Military Region and delivered to Port-de-Bouc.⁴⁷

11th June: Departure of the Altalena with the agreement of the French Navy.⁴⁸

As will have been noted, Ariel's diary entries indicate meetings with the respective heads of the Sûreté, Pierre Boursicot and the DST, Roger Wybot. One can therefore safely assume that the Minister of the Interior, Jules Moch, was kept informed of progress on the Irgun's arms deal. Indeed Moch's memoirs confirm as much (see Chapter 5). Consequently there can be little doubt that the Haganah, both in France and Israel was also fully in the picture. At this stage therefore, the assumption has to be that the Provisional Government in Israel raised no objection to the ship's sailing.

Despite the security measures taken, the content of the cargo of the Altalena became widely known. Indeed there was a newspaper article in the Marseillaise on the subject.⁴⁹ Thus not only was the Haganah fully aware but also the Arab North African inhabitants of Marseilles. In their case they had enough influence to ensure that on 9th June the dockers at Port-de-Bouc refused to continue the loading of the ship with the armaments. Their leaders insisted that the terms of the truce about to be initiated between the Israeli and Arab armies precluded the supply of war materials to the belligerents. In the event the loading was completed with help from the ship's crew and the

⁴⁷ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault 457AP124, "Affaire Irgoun."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Archives Départementales des BDR, 148W185, report of RG indicates that the instigator of the article in the Marseillaise was the Secretary General of the town hall at Port-de-Bouc, 11.6.48.

young immigrants on board. A plan by Arab militants in Marseilles to descend on the port and sabotage the ship was only averted by the intervention of their local leaders, who cautioned restraint.⁵⁰

The date of departure of the *Altalena* coincided, according to unsubstantiated Israeli sources, with the French Government's decision to abide by the UN decision of 29th May to impose an arms embargo for the period of the truce between the Arabs and Israel. This was then, seemingly, the final arms shipment to be made to Israel until the end of the truce.

Bidault's involvement in the *Altalena* affair was a well-kept secret within the MAE and was not even communicated to their representatives abroad. In two instances, French ambassadors reported to the MAE on local newspaper articles concerning the *Altalena* in terms which showed their complete ignorance of the involvement of the MAE.⁵¹ The French consulates in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as their reports were to show, were equally in the dark as to the origin of the arms. Thus far, those around Bidault could congratulate themselves on a successful and secret operation, but they were to be dismayed at the outcome.

On 21st June 1948, after the Irgun had rejected an ultimatum to give up the arms, a bloody confrontation developed on the shores of Israel at Kfar Vitkin between the Irgun and Palmach forces despatched to the area by the Provisional Government. With more than 50% of the cargo of the *Altalena* unloaded on shore and the immigrants already transferred to military training camps, the Palmach suddenly opened fire on the Irgun. Those on shore were eventually forced to surrender, but prior to that the *Altalena* had sailed off down the coast with Menachem Begin, the head of the Irgun and other leaders on board. The confrontation with Palmach forces recommenced the next day on the Tel Aviv shore line and in adjoining streets, as Irgun forces attempted to reach Begin.

⁵⁰ Archives Départementales des BDR, 148W141-Israël. Service Départemental des Renseignements Généraux, Marseille. Surveillance reports on *Altalena* dated 9th, 11th and 15th June 1948.

⁵¹ MAE Archives, Volontaires Arabes, File 401, Letter from Gilbert Arvengas, Ambassador in Cairo, 14.6.48 and a letter from René Massigli, Ambassador in London, 5.7.48.

These internecine battles finally ended after Ben Gurion gave orders to shell the Altalena. She caught fire but most on board, including Begin, managed to get ashore. Irgun forces were then disarmed by the Palmach both in the streets of Tel Aviv and at their barracks.⁵² In Kfar Vitkin and Tel Aviv there had been about twenty fatalities. This episode remains a source of rancour between the Israeli right and the left to this day, each side blaming the other for this tragic confrontation.

Menachem Begin has always asserted that despite the extreme provocation that the destruction of the Altalena presented to the Irgun, he wished at all costs to avoid a fratricidal conflict in Israel amounting to civil war and therefore ordered his forces not to retaliate.⁵³

The stated Provisional Government position was that Ben Gurion, by this action and the subsequent mass arrests of Irgun members, had averted a right-wing Putsch and saved the State of Israel.⁵⁴ There is little doubt that Ben Gurion himself promoted this view at the time. In a letter to a fellow Minister, Isaac Gruenbaum, on the Altalena affair, he went out of his way to argue that there had been such a conspiracy. He even went further and professed to have information from France that the voyage of the Altalena had been facilitated by British agents under the influence of Bidault, in order to place the Israeli Government in a difficult position.⁵⁵

Whatever the real truth of this very controversial matter, the political consequences of the Altalena Affair ensured that neither the Irgun, as a military force, nor its political successor the Herut Party, could give effect to their ideology until, in 1977, the ascendancy of Mapai in the political arena was finally weakened.⁵⁶

⁵² Interview on 17.9.05 with Maurice Szwarc, a former member of the Palmach forces, who was present in Tel Aviv on the day and was involved in the subsequent disarming of the Irgun at the Sarafand Army Camp.

⁵³ Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, (London, 1951), 214.

⁵⁴ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP125, Telegramme from Charreyron in Tel Aviv, 24.6.48 reporting on his meeting with Maurice Fischer and other officials.

⁵⁵ Menachem Begin Heritage Centre, Jerusalem, Item no.38. Letter from David Ben Gurion, Ministry of Defence, to Isaac Gruenbaum, 15.7.48.

⁵⁶ Archives Nationales, F7/16107. A RG report of 17.6.58 disclosed that the Herut Party only held 15 seats in a Knesset (Parliament) of 120. The Socialist parties, led by Mapai, controlled 65.

To add further spice to this story, a perplexing entry appears in Vincent Auriol's diary on 29th June. This is seven days after the destruction of the Altalena

I have a meeting with Lejeune [Max Lejeune, Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence], who tells me that the Irgun has taken arms that were destined for the Haganah.

It had been believed that delivery was being made to members of the Haganah, whilst in reality they were Irgun people. Bidault made a mistake.

Furthermore Bidault is asking that arms be delivered to the State of Israel, specifically 75mm canons. Lejeune wants to refuse this demand. I advise him to see the Prime Minister and ask him to sign the delivery authorisations...⁵⁷

The most plausible interpretation of this particular entry is that Bidault, realising that he had carried out a monumental political error in deciding to supply the Irgun, tried to cover his tracks by belatedly suggesting that he had been duped by their representatives into believing that he was actually dealing with the Haganah. To make amends he then proposed the supply to the Provisional Government of the State of Israel quantities of the famous 75mm canon of the French army.

The disastrous fate of the Altalena was referred to by Ariel in a letter to Bidault a couple of weeks after the event. In this letter Ariel sought to reassure him that in spite of this set-back, the Irgun remained committed to its unsigned agreement with the French Government.⁵⁸ However as Bidault was then replaced at the MAE by Robert Schuman, Ariel was unable to pursue matters.

Ariel recommenced writing to Bidault in fawning terms, when he temporarily returned to a position of power in 1949/1950. As ever, there is no indication that Bidault ever replied. Ariel's major hope remained that France should replace British influence, which he contended subverted the present Israeli Government under Ben Gurion. He asserted that only when

⁵⁷ Auriol, 29.6.48.

⁵⁸ Jabotinski Institute Archives, Personal Papers of Schmuël Ariel, Letter to Bidault from Ariel, 7.7.48.

the successors to the Irgun, the Herut Party, took over power would France obtain a suitable partner in the Middle East.⁵⁹

The real motivation behind Bidault's involvement in the Altalena affair, if one discards his testimony as being self-serving and basically dishonest, still remains elusive. Nevertheless one suggestion by the French reporter Jacques Derogy is worthy of some consideration.

He refers to French concern for their Catholic and other institutions threatened by the conflict then raging in Jerusalem between Irgun and Haganah forces on the one hand and Jordan's Arab Legion on the other. According to him the delivery of arms to the Irgun was made against their promise that they would safeguard these institutions.⁶⁰

Given that Bidault's party, the MRP, although not tied to the Catholic Church, had its origins among Catholic militants and that the Prime Minister, Robert Schuman was a staunch Catholic, it is not unreasonable to suppose that religion may have played some part in considering the Irgun's request.⁶¹

What is certain is that Schuman rejected all blandishments within the Government coalition to recognise the State of Israel until he had received some assurances from the Provisional Government as to the evacuation of French institutions by Israeli forces and compensation for the damage caused to them. This was achieved in January 1949.⁶²

In retrospect, supplying arms to the Irgun, could be seen as an irrational and irresponsible act, much as Bidault's later clandestine activities in the OAS in 1962 against de Gaulle over his granting of independence to Algeria. On the other hand, rather than seeking deep reasons for Bidault's action, one perhaps should treat this matter purely at face value. In effect, a friendly gesture by him to the Irgun, with which he possibly had more political affinity than the Mapai-dominated Provisional Government.

⁵⁹ Archives Nationales, Fonds Georges Bidault, 457AP126, letter of 22.5.50

⁶⁰ Jacques Derogy and Hesi Carmel, *Histoire Secrète d'Israël, 1917-1977* (Paris, 1978), 125.

⁶¹ Elgey, 159.

Morin, to a greater extent than Bidault, seems to have been completely captivated by Ariel's charm and charisma and his arguments that France would regain its position in the Levant thanks to the Irgun. From their first meeting their friendship blossomed.

Later, Jules Moch brought Morin to the Ministry of the Interior. However when it was noticed that Schmuël Ariel used to visit him there, Morin was warned by Moch, that contact with the Irgun was incompatible with the friendly relations of France with the Israeli Provisional Government. He stressed that it would be inconceivable for Morin to help the Irgun to oppose that Government.⁶³ However once Morin had left Government service, his friendship for Ariel undiminished, he ensured through his many commercial contacts that Ariel was able to earn a decent living by writing promotional literature for overseas governments.⁶⁴

After his initial meetings in Paris in 1972 Nakdimon wrote to a number of Government Ministers, civil servants and others whom he thought might have been involved in the Altalena Affair. Their responses varied between obfuscation and some reasonably clear indication of their role, whether in the matter of the Altalena or, alternatively, in aiding illegal immigration.

In his response, Pierre-Henri Teitgen hid behind the cloak of Government secrecy and refused to comment. Roger Wybot admitted to the assistance given at the time to groups who worked for the creation of the State of Israel. Edouard Depreux gave a subtle confirmation that Marcel Pagès took his cue from Depreux's benign attitude towards visa problems. Maurice Cottentin tacitly admitted that he had worked hard to expedite the arms shipment for the Altalena and that he had worked closely with Schmuël Ariel. Jules Moch admitted that "A private, discreet and continuous working relationship existed between certain French Ministers and Israeli emissaries... well before the creation of the State of Israel." He further commented that there had been no discussions in Cabinet on the supply of

⁶² Hersbco, 175.

⁶³ Morin, 73.

arms either to the Irgun or the Haganah. General Georges Revers admitted that the arms supply for the Altalena was "somewhat clandestine and not dealt with through normal administrative procedures." The operation was carried out through direct contacts between General Coudraux and the colonel in charge of the army depot.⁶⁵

In the case of Claire Vaydat, Nakdimon was able to interview her when she came to Israel in August 1980. Amongst other details mainly concerned with her efforts to extricate Yitzhak Shamir and Arye Ben Eliezer from Djibouti, he reported that she was instrumental in obtaining large supplies of weapons from the French Government for the Altalena and that most of her contacts in France had been with Irgun representatives and particularly Schmuel Ariel.⁶⁶

The Altalena affair, although exceptional in that it solely involved the MAE, underlines once again the closeness of the contacts, albeit covert, which Zionist emissaries were able to achieve with French Government Ministers and their officials and the sympathy and material assistance which was extended to them. However the signs of strife between the Provisional Government and the Irgun over the Affair provided Robert Schuman, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, with a pretext for proposing that the French Government postpone the immediate recognition of the State of Israel.⁶⁷ De facto recognition finally came in January 1949 in a coordinated move with the British. Although this was upgraded to de jure recognition in May 1949, the respective legations of the two countries were not raised to Embassy level until November 1952. Five months later, Maurice Fischer's term as the first Israeli Ambassador to France came to an end with his transfer to Ankara.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Morin, 75.

⁶⁵ Documents provided by Schlomo Nakdimon, 3.6.04. Copies of letters and replies.

⁶⁶ *Yediot Ahronot*, article by Shlomo Nakdimon, 11.8.80.

⁶⁷ Archives of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences- Politiques, Fonds Cletta et Daniel Mayer, 3MA15, Note of comments made by Robert Schuman to Marc Sangnier on 18.8.48, (supplied by Maurice Fischer, Israel's Paris Representative to Cletta Mayer on 20.8.48).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.23MIA-Service Israélien d'information-Ambassade d'Israël.

The evident coolness in diplomatic relations between 1948 and 1952 is attributed by Benjamin Pinkus to the lingering dispute between the two countries over the status of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Basically France had wished for international as opposed to Israeli control over them.⁶⁹ In the end France had to accept the status quo, whereby Israel established its authority over the part of divided Jerusalem it controlled.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Pinkus, "Ben Gurion et la France » Les Nouveaux Cahiers, No.90, Autumn (Paris, 1987), 23-31.

Conclusion

As one might have anticipated, because of the overriding need for secrecy, archival documents did not directly provide incontrovertible proof of complicity by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport in the illegal immigration activities of the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet in France. On the contrary, it has required a careful analysis and interpretation of documentation from a number of diverse sources, aided by the historiography on the subject, to bring the pieces of this complex jigsaw puzzle together.

The picture that finally emerged from this exercise did provide compelling circumstantial evidence that the assistance which was afforded by the heads of these Ministries not only facilitated illegal immigration through French ports but was extended to other issues which were of major concern to the Yishuv. These included France's position on the Palestine Partition vote in the UN, the official recognition of the State of Israel and the supply of military supplies at its birth. Although treated as separate projects, with greater or lesser degrees of success from the Zionist viewpoint, together they represent a considerable effort by identified elements within the French Government to ensure the creation and then the survival of a Jewish State in Palestine. As we have shown, taking the Altalena Affair as an example, even those factions within the Government who, at first sight, appeared to be opposed to the Zionist endeavour, did at the end of the British Mandate appear to somewhat reverse their position.

It was not merely by chance that a decision was taken by the Zionist leaders to set up the European headquarters of the Mossad in France. The favourable conditions, which were self-evident to the Palestinian emissaries, made France the ideal location from which to organise and control all the facets of illegal immigration. Standing astride the routes from the DP Camps to the Mediterranean ports, France's geographical location offered ideal transit facilities by either road or rail for potential immigrants to Palestine. But there were even more important considerations. Unlike its close neighbours, France regained its sovereignty immediately at the end of the war and could determine its own political agenda, particularly with regard to the treatment of refugees who sought a temporary haven within its borders. Secondly, within the Jewish community there was a powerful Zionist sentiment in favour of opening the doors of Palestine to unlimited Jewish immigration.

This tendency was developed into a political programme by a number of intermediaries who had connections in both the French Zionist and Socialist camps. As a result, they wielded considerable influence over Socialist Ministers within the ruling coalition and in particular, their spiritual head, Léon Blum. The contribution of such intermediaries as André Blumel, Marc Jarblum and L'Abbé Alexandre Glasberg have yet to be more fully assessed, as their work often demanded extreme discretion and tact, which left little by way of a documentation trail. The same could be said of a number of influential Zionist lobbyists who also had direct lines of communication to various Ministers.

On a purely practical level it has been noted how the skills acquired by Avraham Polonski's Armée Juive, during their war-time activities, were appropriated by Ben Gurion to serve the Haganah in Europe. Testimonies have been presented from young French Jews as to how they were recruited into the Haganah and the missions they were asked to carry out on its behalf. There can be little doubt that Polonski's contacts and knowledge of French culture and the ways of its bureaucracy facilitated the creation of an effective infrastructure for the Mossad's own operations with the least exposure. Also France provided Ben Gurion with a safe and secure haven at a time when he needed it most. The various reports of Renseignements Généraux illustrated only too well how this environment enabled continuity in the activities of the Jewish Agency's Executive despite the incarceration in Palestine of many of its leaders. We also noted that after Weizmann's defeat at the 22nd World Zionist Congress Ben Gurion became, on his return to Palestine, the undisputed leader of the Jewish Agency and all its institutions.

With regard to the day to day operations of the Jewish Agency in France, the letters of complaint by the local Director, Ruth Kluger revealed the chaotic manner in which Palestinian emissaries of different political affiliations were assigned to DP Camps in Europe and the lack of discipline with which they approached their tasks. As against this state of affairs, the positive manner in which the Mossad operatives carried out their work reflected a cohesiveness and motivation which had much to do with the experience gained in the Haganah and their allegiance to the kibbutz movement. Much has been made of their probity in situations where vast sums of money were carried around and distributed either to pay bribes or to buy and equip ships. In this respect the level of financial assistance given by the Joint, almost against its better judgement, to illegal immigration has been carefully assessed and was found to be at considerable variance from previously published estimates.

An attempt has been made to present an image of Shaul Meirov, as seen by those who either worked for him in Paris or later wrote biographical notes on him. Except for one notable exception in the historiography, there was a grudging admiration for his leadership of the Mossad and the sense of mission he instilled in his "soldiers." He was clearly a man who preferred to keep a very low profile and is reputed to have refused the Defence Ministry portfolio which Ben Gurion offered to him in the first Knesset.

A phenomenon which clearly had positive consequences for the Mossad was the nature of coalition politics in post-war France. This enabled the individual components of the Government to operate on party-political lines, with little regard for solidarity or consensus politics. Despite the many changes of Government, the Mossad was assured of continued support for its activities at least until the Exodus Affair when the laxity of controls at the ports was exposed to the embarrassment of certain Ministries.

Although this thesis concentrates on French political involvement in illegal immigration activities, this issue was very low in the Government's own order of priorities. Rather, it was the severe social and economic problems arising from the destruction caused in the liberation of France which particularly concentrated the minds of the politicians. At the same time the need to create new and viable political institutions to replace those of the Vichy regime was also an important part of the agenda. The problem of how best to deal with Germany was also an issue and the French Government was keen to tap into the German labour-force to speed up its reconstruction efforts. In this they needed the active support of Great Britain whilst the latter, as a quid-pro-quo, sought the MAE's cooperation to stop illegal immigration from French ports. The launch of the Marshall Plan also required close coordination between France and Great Britain to obtain the most beneficial outcome for their economies. These various factors were certainly major pre-occupations of the MAE and, consequently, illegal immigration proved to be an unwelcome distraction. Much of the interchange of correspondence between the various Ministries attests to the level of frustration and pure annoyance which the whole subject generated. In this battle of wills some of the main contests were led by senior civil servants, who clearly were subject to outside influences either pro-Zionist or pro-British depending on the Ministry they served. The documentation certainly suggests that in many cases they attempted to dictate policy to their Ministers rather than, as one would expect, the other way round.

Although much reference has been made to the assistance provided by Socialist Ministers, it is also clear that within the Executive of the Party (the SFIO's Comité Directeur) there was no overall consensus on the attitude to be adopted towards Zionism. One is left to conclude that whatever pro-Zionist tendencies existed they were confined to a number of Ministers particularly close to Léon Blum and one should not evade the conclusion that because many were Jewish this was a large influencing factor. One has to treat with a degree of caution claims that their actions were primarily dictated by humanitarian considerations for Jews less fortunate than themselves and that this was a natural obligation devoid of religious sentiment.

The advent of the "Cold War", which set the Soviet Union against her former Western Allies, was a particularly difficult problem for France to deal with, given the pro-Soviet position of the French Communist Party, the largest political party in France at this time. With the removal of the Communist Ministers from Government in May 1947, the days of "Tripartism", which had served the Mossad so well, were drawing to a close. But the major factor affecting the Mossad's ability to operate effectively in France was the unwelcome exposure of its activities as a result of the Exodus Affair. This caused embarrassment to the Socialist Ministers in the Government who were forced to acknowledge the laxity of controls over immigrants' visas and therefore had to take appropriate action. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, the subtle games played by the Interior Ministry's Marcel Pagès to deflect the MAE's attention from the true nature of the immigration traffic through the ports, had provided the Mossad with virtually two years of unimpeded action.

Ancillary to Pagès's efforts was the protective shield placed by the French counter-espionage Agency (DST) around the Mossad's activities and its operatives. It successfully deflected the British Secret Service from the mission it had received from the British Government to disrupt the illegal immigration traffic. Certainly the documentation showed that the Cabinet Defence Committee deployed vast resources in manpower and equipment to bring illegal immigration to an end, all to no avail. In the process and despite the fact that the majority of illegal ships were successfully intercepted, this resulted in much adverse publicity for British standing in the world.

In essence, by far the majority of illegal immigrants were grudgingly admitted into Palestine, with varying degrees of delays, even before the end of the Mandate. In that sense, although one could find good reason to criticise the conditions and the selection process under which illegal immigrants were transported to Palestine, the campaign could be said to have been a success.

The exposé of French military aid to the State of Israel served to underline the continuing commitment of Socialist Ministers to ensure that, in addition to facilitating the DPs' transit through France, material aid to ensure their ultimate survival was also forthcoming. Research into this particular feature also revealed the strange and puzzling case of the personal involvement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bidault, in the Altalena Affair and brought into question his real attitude towards Zionism. Unfortunately this enigma still persists as both the available documentation and historiography presented no clear conclusions. Bidault's own testimony lacked so much credibility that it has to be discarded as a serious answer to the question.

There certainly remain other aspects of French complicity in Aliyah Bet yet to be fully explored. Fortunately, the French National Archive's sixty-year rule appertaining to the period under consideration will soon come to the end of its term. Thereafter, access to other documentation on the subject will become more readily available. In the meantime I hope that this dissertation has firmly established that a French connection to Aliyah Bet not only existed and was extensive but was also the vector for the provision of other assistance to enable the new State of Israel to establish itself in 1948.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION TO PALESTINE 1945-1948: THE FRENCH CONNECTION.

ABBREVIATIONS

NAME	ACRONYM	COMMENT
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee	AJJDC or JDC	Jewish philanthropic welfare and relief organisation set up after WW1. Popularly referred to as 'The Joint'
Conseil Interoeuvres de l'Aide aux Emigrants et Transitaires Juifs	CIATJ	Joint Council for assistance to immigrant and transiting Jews. Council set up by 17 Jewish organisations to obtain transit visas for Jewish immigrants from French authorities
Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France	CRIF	Official representative body for all Jewish institutions in France created in 1944
Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire	DST	French internal counter-espionage agency
Displaced Persons	DPs	Population forced to leave its own country and reside in another country
Eclaireurs Israélites de France	EIF	French Jewish scouting movement
Fédération des Sociétés Juives de France	FSJF	Federation of Jewish Societies in France. Umbrella organisation of all Jewish organisations in France. Generally pro-Zionist
International Refugee Organisation	IRO	Replaced UNRRA in 1947
Irgun Zvai Leumi	IRGUN/ETZEL	National Military Organisation. Para-military organisation which took its ideology from the Revisionists
L'Armée Juive	AJ	Jewish Resistance Group set up in France in 1942. Later known as Organisation juive de combat (OJC)
Lochamei Herut Israel (Stern Group)	LECHI	Israel's Freedom Fighters. Break-away faction from the Irgun. Initially led by Avraham Stern
Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel	MAPAI	Eretz Israel Workers Party (Labour) in Palestine led by David Ben Gurion
Military Intelligence	MIS	British Military Intelligence. (Theoretically only operated within Great Britain and overseas possessions)
Ministère des Affaires Etrangères	MAE	French Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NAME	ACRONYM	COMMENT
Mossad l'Aliyah Bet	MOSSAD	Institute for Parallel (Illegal) Immigration set up by the Haganah to bring Jews clandestinely to Palestine before WW2
Mouvement de Jeunesse Sionist	MJS	Zionist Youth Movement. Active in the resistance during the war
Mouvement Républicain Populaire	MRP	Christian Democratic Party (Right of centre)
Organisation Reconstruction Travail	ORT	Jewish international technical training Agency
Parti Communiste Français	PCF	French Communist Party
Parti Socialiste Français	SFIO	Section Française de l'international Ouvrière (French Socialist Party).
Plugot Mahatz	PAI.MACH	Shock troops of the Haganah.
Plugot Yam	PALYAM	Naval arm of the Palmach
Rassemblement du Peuple Français	RPF	Rally of the French People. A party set up by General de Gaulle in 1946
Renseignements Généraux	RG	French Political Police (Responsible for surveillance of potentially subversive organisations). Controlled by Ministry of the Interior
Secret intelligence Service	SIS/ MI6	British Secret Service. (Operated only abroad)
Service de la Reglementation et des Etrangers	SRE	French Aliens Office within Ministry of the Interior. Controlled by Sûreté Nationale
Service de Documentation Extérieure et Contre-Espionnage	SDECE	French overseas counter-espionage agency
Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et l'Entraide	UJRE	Jewish Union for Resistance and Mutual Help. A Jewish Communist organisation
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency	UNRRA	Organisation set up in 1943 by the United Nations to supervise the welfare of Displaced Persons
United Nations Special Committee on Palestine	UNSCOP	Special UN committee set up following Britain's proposal to relinquish the present Mandate.
United States Forces European Theatre	USFET	Replaced SHAEF after the war.
World Jewish Congress	WJC	International Jewish body

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION TO PALESTINE 1945-1948:THE FRENCH CONNECTION

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 - Archives Privées : AP
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 - Fonds Georges Bidault
 - Fonds Léon Blum
 - Fonds René Cassin
 - Fonds Edouard Depreux
 - Fonds Georgette Elgey
 - Fonds René Mayer
 - Fonds Jules Moch
 - Archives Ministre de L'intérieur
 - Objets Généraux F/1a
 - Police Générale F/7
 - Fonds Divers AJ
- Archives Nationales, Fontainebleau. (Centre des Archives Contemporaines)
 - Dossier de carrière Marcel Pagès
- Archives Départementales des Bouches- du- Rhône (BDR), Marseilles
 - Préfecture/Cabinet du Préfet
- Bibliothèque de L'Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris
- Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC), Paris
- Consistoire de Paris, Service Archives, Paris
- Service Historique de L'Armée de Terre (SHAT), Château de Vincennes, Vincennes

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Cabinet Office	CAB
Colonial Office	CO
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ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948

Immigrants interned or free in Palestine

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Original Name	Renamed at Sea	Departure	Departure	Date	Total	Interned	Interned	Interned	Free in	Notes
2			Port	Country	arrived	Immigrants	Athlit	Cyprus	Germany	Palestine	
3											
4	From August 1945										
5	Dalin		Monopoli	Italy	28.8.45	35				35	Landed at Caesaria
6	Netuno A		Bari	Italy	4.9.45	79				79	Landed at Caesaria
7	Gabriella		Piraeus	Greece	9.9.45	40				40	Landed at Caesaria
8	Pietro A		S. Margherita	Italy	19.9.45	168				168	Landed at Shafayim
9	Netuno B		Monopoli	Italy	1.10.45	73				73	Landed at Shafayim
10	Petro B		Taranto	Italy	26.10.45	174				174	Landed at Shafayim
11	Dimitrios	Beri Katznelson	Lavrio	Greece	23.11.45	220	20			200	
12	Marie	Hanna Senesh	Savona	Italy	25.12.45	252				252	Beached at Nahariya
13	Total 1945	8 Boats				1041	20			1021	
14											
15	YEAR 1946										
16	Rondina	Enzo Sereni	Savona	Italy	18.1.46	908	908				
17	Kismet	Wingate	Pellestrina Isl.	Italy	25.3.46	248	248				
18	Aya	Tei Chai	La Ciotat	France	27.3.46	733	733				
19	Smyrna	Max Nordau	Constanza	Romania	14.5.46	1662	1662				
20	Fede	Dov Hos	La Spezia	Italy	18.5.46	500				500	Special case
21	Fenice	Eliahu Golomb	La Spezia	Italy	18.5.46	514				514	special case
22	Agios Ioannis	Haviva Reik	Piraeus	Greece	8.6.46	462	462				
23	Beauharnois	Josiah Wedgwood	Savona	Italy	25.6.46	1278	1278				
24	Akbel	Biria	Sete	France	2.7.46	1108	1108				
25	Norsyd	Haganah	Bakar	Yugoslavia	29.7.46	2760	2760				
26	Hochelaga	Ha 'Chayal Ha'lvri	Antwerp	Belgium	31.7.46	510	510				
27	Sagolem	Yagur	La Ciotat	France	11.8.46	754		754			
28	Maria Serra	Katriel Yaffe	Bocca di Magra	Italy	13.8.46	614		614			
29	Ariette Salom	Henrietta Szold	Greece	Greece	12.8.46	535		535			
30	San Pisero	Kaf Gimmel Yordei (The 23)	Bocca di Magra	Italy	14.8.46	815		815			
31	Ideros	Amiram Shochet	Pozzuoli	Italy	16.8.46	183				183	Landed at Caesaria
32	Fede 2	Arba heruyot	Bocca di Magra	Italy	2.9.46	997		997			
33	Ariella	Palmach	Bocca di Magra	Italy	21.9.46	611		611			
34	Fenice 2	Bracha Fuld	Mola di Bari	Italy	18.10.46	816		816			

Sourced from:

Fritz Liebreich, Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine; P.H. Silverstone, Clandestine Immigration to Palestine; N. Stewart, The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948
Immigrants interned or free in Palestine

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
35	Original Name	Renamed at sea	Departure	Departure	Date Arrived		Interned	Interned	Interned	Free in	Notes
36			Port	Country			Athlit	Cyprus	Germany	Palestine	
37											
38	1946 (Continued)										
39	San Dimitrio	Latrun	La Ciotat	France	30.10.46	1279		1279			
40	Lohita (Anna)	Knesset Israel	Bakar	Yugoslavia	28.11.46	3914		3914			
41	Athina	Rafiah	Bakar	Yugoslavia	7.12.46	782		782			Sunk at Sirina
42	TOTAL 1946	22 Boats				21983	9669	11117	0	1197	
43											
44	YEAR 1947										
45	Merica	La Negev	Sete	France	8.2.47	656		656			
46	San Miguel	Ha' Maapil Ha'Almoni	Sete	France	16.2.47	807		807			
47	Ulua	Chaim Arlosoroff	Metaponte	Italy	27.2.47	1398		1,398			Beached at Bat Galim
48	Abril	Ben Hecht	Port de Bouc	France	8.3.47	599		599			
49	Susanna	Shabtai luzinski	Metaponte	Italy	12.3.47	835		835			Beached at Nitzanim
50	San Felipo	Moledet	Metaponte	Italy	29.3.47	1577		1,577			
51	Guardian	Theodor Herzl	Sete	France	13.4.47	2622		2,622			
52	Galata	She'ar Yasuv	Bogliasco	Italy	23.4.47	768		768			
53	Trade Winds	hatikvah	Bocca di Magra	Italy	17.5.47	1422		1,422			
54	Arietta	Mordei Haghetaot	Moladi	Italy	23.5.47	1457		1,457			
55	Anai	Yehuda Halevi	Tenes	Algeria	31.5.47	399		399			
56	President Warfield	Exodus'47	Sete	France	18.7.47	4554			4554		Shipped to Hamburg
57	Luciano M	Shivat Zion	Algiers	Algeria	28.7.47	398		398			
58	Bruna	Y.D.Halelei Ge'her Aziv	Miglarino	Italy	28.7.47	685		685			
59	Farida	Af-Ai-Pi-Chen	Bay of Gaeta	Italy	27.9.47	446		446			
60	Northlands	Medinat Ha'Yehudim	Burgas	Bulgaria	2.10.47	2664		2,664			
61	Paduca	Geulah	Burgas	Bulgaria	2.10.47	1385		1,385			
62	Raphael Luccia	Kadimah	Pellestrina Isl.	Italy	16.11.47	794		794			
63	Albertina	Aliyah	Bandol	France	16.11.47	187				187	Beached at Nahariya
64	Maria Annick	Ha'Forzim	Bazoule	France	4.12.47	187				187	Boat escaped
65	Mara Christina	Lo Tafchidinu	Porto Venere	Italy	23.12.47	850		850			
66	Maria Giovanni	Kaf Tet Be'November	Corsica	France	28.12.47	688		688			
67	Pan Crescent	Atzmaut	Burgas	Bulgaria	31.12.47	7612		7,612			
68	Pan York	Kibbutz Galuyot	Burgas	Bulgaria	31.12.47	7557		7,557			
69	TOTAL 1947	24 boats				40527		36,619	4554	354	

Sourced from:

Fritz Liebreich, Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine; P.H. Silverstone, Clandestine Immigration to Palestine; N. Stewart, The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948
Immigrants interned or free in Palestine

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
70	Original Name	Renamed at Sea	Departure	Departure	Date		Interned	Interned	Interned	Free in	Notes
71			Port	Country	Arrived		Athlit	Cyprus	Germany	Palestine	
72											
73	Year 1948										
74	Archmides	Ha'Umot Ha'Meuchadot	Bay of Gaeta	Italy	1.1.48	537				537	Beached at Nahariya
75	Sylvia starita	L.H. Giborei Kfar Ezion	Venice	Italy	1.2.48	280		280			
76	Cicino Viareggio	Yerushalayim Ha'Netzura	Civitavecchia	Italy	10.2.48	679		679			
77	Abdul Hamid	Komemiut	Saint Tropez	France	20.2.48	705		705			
78	Rondina 2	Bonim VeLochamim	Bakar	Yugoslavia	1.3.48	982		982			
79	Pepino(Esmerelda)	Yechiam	Bay of Gaeta	Italy	29.3.48	769		769			
80	Vivara	Tirat Tevi	Bay of Gaeta	Italy	12.4.48	798		798			
81	Salvador	Mishmar Ha'emek	La Ciotat	France	24.4.48	785		785			
82	Tadome	Nachshon Kastel	Bandol	France	27.4.48	558		558			
83											
84	TOTAL to 15.5.48	9 boats				6093		5556		537	
85											
86	GRAND TOTAL	63 Boats				69644	9689	52292	4554	3109	
87											
88											
89	SUMMARY		TOTALS		1945	1946	1947	1948			
90											
91	Interned Athlit		9689		20	9669					
92	Interned Cyprus		52292			11117	35,619	5556			
93	Interned Germany		4554				4554				
94	Total interned		66535		20	20786	40173	5556			
95											
96	Landed by agreement		1014			1014					
97	Escaped on landing		2095		1021	183	354	537			
98	Total free in Palestine		3109		1021	1197	354	537			
99											
100	GRAND TOTAL		69644		1041	21983	40527	6093			
101											
102	Number of Boats		63		8	22	24	9			
103											
104											

Sourced from:

Fritz Liebreich, Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine; P.H. Silverstone, Clandestine Immigration to Palestine; N. Stewart, The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948
by Country of Departure

	A	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	Original Name	Renamed at Sea	Departure country	Total Immigrants								
2					Italy	Greece	France	Romania	Yugoslavia	Belgium	Algeria	Bulgaria
3												
4	From August 1945											
5	Dalín		Italy	35	35							
6	Netuno A		Italy	79	79							
7	Gabriella		Greece	40		40						
8	Pietro A		Italy	168	168							
9	Netuno B		Italy	73	73							
10	Petro B		Italy	174	174							
11	Dimitrios	Berl Katznelson	Greece	220		220						
12	Marie	Hanna Senesh	Italy	252	252							
13	Total 1945	8 Boats		1041	781	260						
14												
15	Year 1946											
16	Rondina	Enzo Sereni	Italy	908	908							
17	Kismet	Wingate	Italy	248	248							
18	Asya	Tel Chai	France	733			733					
19	Smyrna	Max Nordau	Romania	1662				1662				
20	Fede	Dov Hos	Italy	500	500							
21	Fenice	Eliahu Golomb	Italy	514	514							
22	Agios Ioannis	Haviva Reik	Greece	462		462						
23	Beauharnois	Josiah Wedgwood	Italy	1278	1278							
24	Akbel	Biria	France	1108			1108					
25	Norsyd	Haganah	Yugoslavia	2760					2760			
26	Hochelaga	Ha 'Chayal Ha'Ivri	Belgium	510						510		
27	Sagolem	Yagur	France	754			754					
28	Maria Serra	Katriel Yaffe	Italy	614	614							
29	Ariette Salom	Henrietta Szold	Greece	535		535						
30	San Pisero	Kaf Gimmel Yordei (The 23)	Italy	815	815							
31	Ideros	Amiram Shochet	Italy	183	183							
32	Fede 2	Arba heruyot	Italy	997	997							
33	Ariella	Palmach	Italy	611	611							
34	Fenice 2	Bracha Fuld	Italy	816	816							

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948
by Country of Departure

	A	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
35	Original Name	Renamed at sea	Departure	Total								
36			Country	Immigrants								
37					Italy	Greece	France	Romania	Yugoslavia	Belgium	Algeria	Bulgaria
38	1946 (Continued)											
39	San Dimitrio	Latrun	France	1279			1279					
40	Lohita (Anna)	Knesset Israel	Yugoslavia	3914					3914			
41	Athina	Rafiah	Yugoslavia	782					782			
42	TOTAL 1946	22 Boats		21983	7484	997	3874	1662	7456	510		
43												
44	Year 1947											
45	Merica	La Negev	France	656			656					
46	San Miguel	Ha' Maapil Ha'Almoni	France	807			807					
47	Ulua	Chaim Arlosoroff	Italy	1398	1398							
48	Abril	Ben Hecht	France	599			599					
49	Susanna	Shabtai luzinski	Italy	835	835							
50	San Felipe	Moledet	Italy	1577	1577							
51	Guardian	Theodor Herzl	France	2622			2622					
52	Galata	She'ar Yasuv	Italy	768	768							
53	Trade Winds	hatikvah	Italy	1422	1422							
54	Arietta	Mordei Haghetat	Italy	1457	1457							
55	Anal	Yehuda Halevi	Algeria	399							399	
56	Pesident Warfield	Exodus'47	France	4554			4554					
57	Luciano M	Shivat Zion	Algeria	398							398	
58	Bruna	Y.D.Halelei Gesher Aziv	Italy	685	685							
59	Farida	Af-AI-Pi-Chen	Italy	446	446							
60	Northlands	Medinat Ha'Yehudim	Bulgaria	2664								2664
61	Paduca	Geulah	Bulgaria	1385								1385
62	Raphael Luccia	Kadimah	Italy	794	794							
63	Albertina	Aliyah	France	187			187					
64	Maria Annick	Ha'Forzim	France	167			167					
65	Mara Christina	Lo Tafchidinu	Italy	850	850							
66	Maria Giovanni	Kaf Tet Be'November	France	688			688					
67	Pan Crescent	Atzmaut	Bulgaria	7612								7612
68	Pan York	Kibbutz Galuyot	Bulgaria	7557								7557
69	TOTAL 1947	24 boats		40527	10232		10280				797	19218

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION BOATS 1945-1948
by Country of Departure

	A	B	C	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
70	Original Name	Renamed at Sea	Departure	Total								
71			Country	Immigrants								
72					Italy	Greece	France	Romania	Yugoslavia	Belgium	Algeria	Bulgaria
73	Year 1948											
74	Archmides	Ha'Umot Ha'Meuchadot	Italy	537	537							
75	Sylvia starita	L.H. Giborei Kfar Ezion	Italy	280	280							
76	Cicino Viareggio	Yerushalayim Ha'Netzura	Italy	679	679							
77	Abdul Hamid	Komemiut	France	705			705					
78	Rondina 2	Bonim VeLochamim	Yugoslavia	982					982			
79	Pepino(Esmerelda)	Yechiam	Italy	769	769							
80	Vivara	Tirat Tsvi	Italy	798	798							
81	Salvador	Mishmar Ha'emek	France	785			785					
82	Tadorne	Nachshon Kastel	France	558			558					
83												
84	TOTAL to 15.5.48	9 boats		6093	3063		2048		982			
85												
86	GRAND TOTAL	Number of Immigrants		69644	21560	1257	16202	1662	8438	510	797	19218
87		Number of boats		63	32	4	15	1	4	1	2	4
88												
89												
90	Number of boats by year											
91												
92	1945			8	6	2						
93												
94	1946			22	11	2	4	1	3	1		
95												
96	1947			24	10		8				2	4
97												
98	1948			9	5		3		1			
99												
100	Grand Total			63	32	4	15	1	4	1	2	4
101												
102												



Index 2